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The Their Presumptive and the Their Apparent.

By MRS. OLIPHANT,

Author of "THE SON OF HIS FATHER," "SIR TOM," "THE CHRONICLES
OF CARLINGFORD," "NEIGHBOURS ON THE GREEN,"
"KIRSTEEN," etc., etc.

CHAPTER V.

IT was in the beginning of the shooting season, when birds were still plentiful and the best of the sportsmen visitors were come or coming, that Letitia was one evening startled by hearing of the arrival of a gentleman, who was one more than the number expected. Such a thing had been known before, for John's invitations were sometimes a little vague and he occasionally made a mistake; but it was particularly annoying on this occasion, because Mrs. Parke had not been at home for tea, and, therefore, was not at hand to place the unexpected guest.

"The only thing I could do, ma'am, in the circumstances," said the butler, "was to refer to Miss Hill, and she said the gentleman must have her room; so I put him in Miss Hill's room."

"You were quite right, Saunders, since Miss Hill was so kind; and I daresay it will be all right. But you have not told me who the gentleman was."

The butler made a little pause—a respectable family servant never forgets that every family has its secrets. He coughed discreetly behind his hand. "I did not ask the gentleman's name, ma'am—Miss Hill seemed to know him very well."

"Miss Hill—knew him very well!" Astonishment and a certain consternation came into Letitia's face. But she recollected herself, perceiving Saunders' look of extreme discretion, which is always an alarming thing. "I have no doubt it is all right," she said, with great self-possession, "and you have done exactly what you ought to have done in referring to Miss Hill. Send up some

one to my room with a cup of good tea. One never gets tea one can drink out of one's own house."

Mrs. Parke repeated to herself, "Some one Mary knows," under her breath. She was momentarily disturbed. Could it be a piece of presumption on Mary's part bringing in some one she knew? But this was so incredible that Letitia dismissed the idea, laying it all upon the broad shoulders of John. "He must have made a mistake again," she said to herself. She was late, every one had gone to dress for dinner, and the mistress of the house only lingered for a moment in the drawing-room to see that all was in order, to give a little pull to the curtains, and a little push to the chairs such as the mistress of the house always finds necessary when she is expecting guests, breaking the air of inevitable primness which the best of servants are apt to have. She looked round to see that all was right, and then she went upstairs to her room to dress. Mary was standing on the stairs at the end of the corridor which led to the nursery, evidently waiting for her. "Oh, can I speak a word, Letitia?" she said.

"I don't see how you can," said Mrs. Parke, "for I am late, and you know the Witheringhams are coming. I cannot keep them waiting. But come into my room, if you like, while I dress."

Mary was not coming to dinner on that evening, so that she had no need to dress. She looked pale and anxious standing in the doorway at the end of the nursery passage in her old grey gown. "But I must speak to you alone—not before your maid," she said.

"Some naughtiness, I suppose," said Letitia with a little sigh of despairing impatience. "Really, you are too particular. But it must wait till to-morrow, my dear—I have only time to slip on my dress."

"But oh, Letitia——"

"For goodness' sake don't bother me to death when you know the Witheringhams are coming," Mrs. Parke said. And she went into her room, leaving her friend standing outside. Letitia did not close the door, but left it possible for Mary to follow her, if the communication was so very urgent. But this Miss Hill did not do. She hesitated a moment, wrung her hands, and then disappeared like a ghost within the narrow portals of the nursery passage. Had Letitia only known the words that were on her lips, had Mary been less frightened, less terrified at the sound of her

own voice! But it could not have made much difference after all—the shock would have been perhaps less great—but to do away with it altogether was not in any one's power.

Letitia dressed in great haste. She had only time to swallow the cup of tea which she had ordered—to put on her new velvet with the point lace and diamonds—a *rivière*, but nothing much to speak of, which Frogmore had sent her on the birth of the heir—and to pull on one of her gloves, when a sound of carriage wheels in the avenue made her hurry downstairs to be in her place before the Witheringhams arrived. The Witheringhams had never dined at Greenpark before. They were very fine people indeed, the oldest family in the county, though he was only a baron, so rich that they did not know what to do with their money. They lived a great deal abroad, and it so happened that Letitia had never before been able to offer her hospitality to these distinguished persons who were so little in need of a dinner. For the first time it had "suited" to-night, and to have been a moment late, or to have anything out of order, would have been a sin which Letitia, such a model of social propriety as she was, would not have forgiven herself. Happily, she was not only in the drawing-room herself, but two or three of the *élite* of her guests had come down in good time and stood about like black statues in that irreproachable *tenue* which specially distinguishes Englishmen. It was a moment indescribable when Letitia placed Lady Witheringham in the easiest chair, and sitting down near her, with the warmest cordiality mingled with respect, made the discovery that this great lady's diamonds were really after all not as good as her own. She did not betray the consciousness, but it gave her a secret exhilaration. She felt that she approached her guests upon nearer terms.

"It is a pleasure we have wished for so long, dear Lady Witheringham," she said, "to see you in our own house."

"We are a great deal away," said the old lady. "Witheringham can't stand the winter in England—and to tell the truth when we are at home we are not fond of new people, neither he nor I."

"I hope," said Letitia, "that we can scarcely be considered new people now. After nearly seven years——"

She saw her mistake immediately, but Lady Witheringham only smiled. "My husband," she said, with a slight emphasis, "knew the first Lord Frogmore. He got his title for something

or other—services to the government.” Here the old lady laughed, as if there could be nothing more ridiculous than acquiring a peerage in this way. “But I have heard,” she said, after a pause, “that your own family was quite respectable.”

Letitia was not proud of her family, and liked to bring it forward as little as possible, but a natural sentiment still existed in her bosom, which was touched by this remark. “Oh, indeed, I hope so,” she cried, with a slight movement of irritation, which she was not able to conceal.

“I mean, of course, in point of antiquity,” said Lady Witheringham, “in other respects we’re all in the hands of Providence. Nothing, you know, can secure morals, or that sort of things—and less in an old family than in others, I sometimes think. Dear me,” she added, raising a double eyeglass, and looking at the other end of the room with curiosity, “what have we here?”

Letitia looked up, following Lady Witheringham’s glance. I may truly say that if Mrs. Parke were to live for a hundred years she would never forget the spectacle that now presented itself to her eyes. The drawing-room at Greenpark was a long room, opening from an ante-room with large folding doors. In the middle of this ample opening stood a figure in a velvet coat, the worse for wear, with a huge beard, long hair and a general air of savagery. He was a little scared apparently by the sight of so many people, and by the looks directed towards him, and stood with a certain hesitation, looking with a half-bold, half-alarmed air at the circle of ladies near the fire. Letitia sprang to her feet, and caught John by the arm. “Go and see who it is; go and send him away,” she said; but even as she spoke her voice went out in a kind of hollow whisper. Oh, heaven and earth! that this should happen to-night.

Everybody was looking towards the same point, and John, much surprised but not daunted, was walking towards this strange intruder, when he seemed to catch sight of Letitia standing thunderstruck by her own hearth. If she had kept her seat and thus kept partially out of sight, things might not have turned out so badly; but everything went against her to-night. The stranger saw her and came forward with a lurch and a shout. “Hallo, Tisch!” he cried. His voice was like a clap of thunder, and shook the pictures on the walls. His big step made the whole house thrill and creak. He caught her in his arms, in the

middle of all the astonished ladies and gentlemen, and gave her a resounding smack that might have been heard half a mile off. "How are you," he said, "my lass? I'm as glad to see ye as if ye were the winner in a tip-top race. I began to think I'd been wrong directed and this wasn't my sister's house after all."

The thoughts that passed through Letitia's mind in the moment of that embrace were too many and too swift to be put on paper. She tore herself out of the huge arms which held her up like an infant, jumping on the floor in a momentary paroxysm of passion, in which if she could she would have killed the inopportune visitor. But even while she did so a whole discussion, argument and counter argument, flashed through her mind. She would have liked to have killed him; but he was here, and the butler was at the door announcing that dinner was served, and Lady Witheringham was certainly surveying this big brute, this horrible savage—as Letitia called him in her heart—through those double eyeglasses. It was necessary that the mistress of the house should quench every sentiment and keep up appearances. She said, "Ralph!" with a little shriek in which some of her excitement got out. "Gracious goodness!" said Letitia, "I thought you were in Africa. How could you give me such a start without a word of warning? John, it's Ralph——." She paused a moment, and the desperate emergency put words into her mouth. "He has been after—big game—till he looks like a lion out of the woods himself," she cried, with another little shriek—this time of laughter. There was a wildness in it which half betrayed her, but she recovered herself with a little stamp of her foot. "John," she said, "dinner is waiting—don't let us keep everything back for this little family scene." She seized her brother by the hand while her guests filed off decorously, almost wounding him with the sharp pressure of her finger nails. "Don't come to dinner," she whispered; "Mary Hill's in the house."

Ralph gave another great laugh. "As if I didn't know that," he said; "but I'm coming to dinner. I want to see you in all your grandeur, Tisch."

She had to take old Lord Witheringham's arm while the brute was talking, and to smile into the old gentleman's face and to sweep past the stranger, leaving him to follow or not as he pleased. Her heart was beating wildly with fury and dismay.

"Don't you think, Lord Witheringham, it is a bad thing when young men go off into the desert—after big game—and grow into savages?" she said. She laughed to blow off some of the excitement, but there was a glare which nobody could have believed possible in her dull eyes.

"That depends very much," said Lord Witheringham, oracularly. He would not commit himself. "Sometimes it is the best thing a young man can do—sometimes it is not so fortunate." Letitia, who expected every moment to have a denial thundering over her shoulder about this big game, and who knew very well that her brother Ralph had not gone away for hunting, as the men did among whom she passed her life, but for very different reasons and to very different regions, was very glad to hurry along at the end of the procession, listening to what went on behind, hoping against hope that Ralph might do what she suggested—that he might go in search of Mary, and not appear at all among people who so plainly did not want him. She thought for some time with a great relief that this was what had happened. But when she had taken her place in the dining-room, between Lord Witheringham on one side and young Lord George Hitherways on the other—that place to which she had looked forward with so much pride and pleasure—she saw by the little commotion among the detached men who came in last, the men who had no ladies to take care of, that there was no such relief for her. Ralph was in the midst of them, conspicuous in his velvet coat. He pushed them about a little so as to get nearer to his sister. "I beg your pardon if I'm taking your place, but I have not seen my sister for ten years," she heard him saying in his big voice; and when all the guests were settled as near as possible in their right places, lo, there he was planted next to Mrs. Kington within three of herself. Letitia grew pale when she saw that her brother was so near—then thanked her stars that at least, since it must be, he was within reach where she herself could do what was possible to subdue him. Oh, that Mary had but been there! Oh, that Mary had but said that word of warning which she had been so anxious to give! Why did not the fool speak? What did it matter whether the maid was present or not? Three words only were needed—"Ralph is here," and then she would have known what to do.

Letitia had looked forward to that dinner as her greatest

triumph. She meant to have been so brilliant and entertaining that Lord Witheringham, who liked to have amusing young women to talk to him, might have been filled with admiration : but how can you be witty and brilliant when you are straining your ears to hear what somebody else is saying ? The conversation flagged in spite of all she could do. Lord Witheringham devoted himself to his dinner with a look of supreme gravity. She herself sat, violently loathing her food, but swallowing it in sheer desperation, feeling every idea that had been in her head desert her. In fact poor Letitia was never brilliant in conversation, but this she did not know.

Meanwhile Mrs. Kington was amusing herself very much, and young Lord George did nothing but laugh and listen to the backwoodsman. "Tell me about the big game," the lady had said in a little mellifluous voice. "I shoot myself, and my husband has made the most famous bags. He was in Africa too. Pray tell me about the big game. Did you go in for lions, or elephants, or what was it ? It is so interesting to meet with a man fresh from the desert."

"You are very kind to say so, my lady," said Ralph, "but it's all nonsense about big game. That's only Tisch's fun. She knows very well I had something quite different in my mind. I've had a shot at a kangaroo or a dog, and I'm sorry to say I've hit a black fellow more than once by mistake. Perhaps that's what she calls big game. Well, it is if you come to that, and deuced serious game, too. You may shoot as many tigers as you like, and get a reward for it, as I've heard ; but if you shoot a black fellow, he's no use even for his skin ; and if it's known you get the Government upon your shoulders just the same as if he was a Christian."

"That is hard," said Mrs. Kington, in her pretty voice. "I suppose you mean negroes, Mr.—" She stopped and looked at Letitia with that delightful impertinence of the higher orders which is one of the finest flowers of civilization. "Do you know," she whispered to Lord George, yet not so low but that Letitia could hear, "John Parke married so much out of our set that I don't know what was her name."

"My name is Ravelstone, and I don't care who knows it," said Ralph. "We are not very particular about names in the bush. Sometimes you may live for years with a fellow at the same

station and never know more than some nickname that's been given him. They used to call me——"

"Your name is as old as any in Yorkshire, Ralph," said Letitia, arresting the revelation. "Dear Lady Witheringham was just saying so. Do you know what she said? That you knew the *first* Lord Frogmore, Lord Witheringham. We won't let John hear, but I know what she meant. She meant that the Parkes were nobody to speak of; but I am happy to say Lady Witheringham was quite acquainted with my family. We have never had a title. What is the good of a mushroom title, that dates only from this century?"

"I entirely agree with you, Mrs. Parke," Lord Witheringham said.

"What is the use," cried Letitia, "of putting on a gloss of nobility when you have the substance before; and what is the use of plastering over a name that means nothing with titles? For my part I think there's nothing like real antiquity—a family that has lived in the same place and owned the same ground from the beginning of time."

"Mrs. Parke, I admire every word you say. Such just feeling is very uncommon," Lord Witheringham said.

"Lord, Tisch, how you do run on! How father would have stared if he had heard you. A title for us!—oh, by Jove?" cried Ralph. His roar shook the table. Oh, if some one would kill him—poison him—put him out of Letitia's sight!

CHAPTER VI.

THE room swam in Letitia's eyes; a mist seemed to rise over the sparkling dining-table—over all the faces of the guests. The voices, too, rang in a kind of hubbub—one confused, big noise, through which she seemed able to be sure of nothing except the words of Ralph and the laughter, in which all round were so ridiculously, so horribly ready to join. What revelations he might make! How certainly he would prove to the others that he was no elegant prodigal from the fashionable deserts where so many great persons went after big game, but a mere Australian stock-man, sent there because nobody knew what to do with him at home! She was vaguely aware of talking a great deal herself to

stop his talking, if possible, with the dreadful result of merely increasing his outpourings, and of having to subside at last, in sheer prostration of faculty, into an alarmed and horrified silence. Ralph, it was evident, amused her guests though he did not amuse Letitia. And that dreadful Mrs. Kington, how she devoted herself to him; how she played upon him and drew him out! When the moment came for the ladies' withdrawal, Letitia rose with mingled relief and terror. She said to herself that no man could be so dangerous by Ralph's side as that clever, spiteful woman; and yet at the same time the dreadful consciousness that among men, when they were alone, revelations still more appalling might be made, and that John knew nothing of this prodigal brother, gave her a new cause of alarm. Even in such dreadful circumstances, however, a woman has to endure and say nothing. She gave Ralph a glance as she passed him which might have annihilated him, but which conveyed no idea to the obtuse mind of the bushman: while he elevated his eyebrows at her, and made a noise with his tongue against his palate. "You are in all your glory, Tisch!" he said, as she passed. But furious and terrified as she was, she had to go like a martyr to the stake and leave him—to do further harm—who could tell? Mary Hill was in the drawing-room when the ladies filed in, wearing a dyed dress which Letitia had given her, with nervous hands clasped tightly together, and anxiety and panic in her eyes. Mrs. Parke gave her an angry grip as she passed, and said in a fierce whisper, "How could you let him come?" to which Mary answered with a confused murmur of anxious explanation. And then the ordeal began once more.

"How amusing your brother is, Mrs. Parke. I don't know when I have laughed so much. It is so delightful to meet a man like that out of the wilds—and so genuine—and so funny!"

"You had all the fun at your end of the table," said another lady. "We heard you all in shrieks of laughter, and wanted to know what it was about."

"It was about everything," said Mrs. Kington, laughing at the recollection. "He is so delightfully wild, and such a democrat, and so unconventional."

"Too much so, a great deal, for the comfort of his family," said Letitia, with a gasp. She was clever enough to seize upon the chance thus afforded her. "It is not so amusing when the person

belongs to you, and when you know how he has thrown away all his chances," she said, panting.

"Ah!" said Lady Witheringham, with sympathy, "young men are so silly; but none of us can throw a stone in that respect."

This, though Letitia did not know it, was as good as a bombshell to Mrs. Kington, who knew a great deal about prodigals.

"To be silly is one thing and to be amusing is another," said that lady; "every man is not such fun who sows wild oats abroad. You must make him tell you about the black fellows. I nearly died of laughing. There is one story I must tell you——"

"For my part I would rather not die of laughing," said the great lady. She took Letitia by the arm and drew her in the direction of the conservatory. "Let me see your flowers," she said, "and never mind what they say. I know what it is," she added, shaking her head, "to have a boy in the family that you can make nothing of. I sympathize with your parents, Mrs. Parke."

The emergency lent a cleverness which she did not possess to Letitia. She said with a half sob, "He had no mother." This was not a loss which she had ever been specially moved by before; but necessity develops the faculties. Lady Witheringham clasped her arm still more closely. "Ah, poor boy!" she said; "tell me, if it does not pain you, dear Mrs. Parke."

Dear Mrs. Parke! the words inspired Letitia. Was it possible, she asked herself piously, that good was to come out of evil? And she did tell Ralph's history, with many details unknown to that gentleman himself, to her sympathetic listener. They walked about softly in front of the subdued lights in the conservatory, the old great lady leaning tenderly upon the arm of John Parke's wife, whom his other guests were describing to each other as a nobody. "He's not a gentleman at all, and I daresay she was a milliner," Mrs. Kington said, feeling it very piquant to communicate these conjectures all but within hearing of the person most concerned. And Letitia divined but now did not care, for had she not got Lady Witheringham on her side?

Mary Hill sat alone, not noticed by any one. She occupied the place which a governess of retiring manners does in such a party. All governesses are not persons of retiring manners, and consequently the rule does not always hold. And Miss Hill was

not the governess. She was not a salaried dependent, but a friend who in reality conferred instead of receiving benefits; but it was as a dependent that everybody regarded her. She sat very quiet, with a sense of guilt towards Letitia which was entirely gratuitous, and a confusing feeling that she was somehow to blame. That she would be blamed she was very well aware, and her powers of vindicating and asserting herself were small. Beyond this, there was great trouble and confusion in Mary's mind. The sight of this big, flushed, disorderly, half-savage man had been a revelation to her even more distressing than his sudden appearance had been to her friend. Letitia's pride was assailed, but in Mary the wound went a great deal deeper. When Ralph had been sent to Australia ten years before, he was young, and his offences, though terrible to a girl's sensitive innocence and ignorance, had been things to weep and pray over rather than to denounce. Poor Ralph! he had been her sweetheart when they were children, he had supposed himself in love with her years ago, and Mary had carried all these years a softened image of him in her heart. She had sighed to herself over it in many a lonely hour. Poor Ralph! if her expectations of his return had never been clear, it was still always a possibility pleasant to think of. And now he had come, and her faintly-visioned idol had fallen prone to the ground, like Dagon in his temple. He had never attained the importance of a demi-god, to whom sacred litanies might be said, but there had been a vague niche for him in the background of the temple. And in a moment he had fallen, with the first sound of his rough voice and sight of his deteriorated countenance. Mary was still under the influence of this shock, and it was complicated by the conviction that she was to blame—that Letitia would think she was to blame, that she would be accused and would not know how to defend herself. She sat alone, trembling over the evening paper which she was pretending to read. She heard the *chuchotement* of the soft yet venomous voices near, which were tearing Letitia's pretensions to pieces, and assuring each other that they had always known her to be a nobody, and the other less audible strain of Letitia's narrative to Lady Witheringham. What romance was she telling about poor Ralph to interest the old lady so—poor Ralph, who never had any story but vulgar dissipation and the sharp remedy of being turned out of his father's house to do what he pleased!

The gentlemen as they came in made the usual diversion, arrested the talk of the ladies, and made an alteration in the groups. But Ralph kept his place among the younger men, standing in a group of them telling his bush stories, keeping up noisy peals of laughter. Somehow the carriages of Lady Witheringham and of Mrs. Kington lingered long that night—or rather, which was a sign that the evening had not been a failure so far as they were concerned, these ladies lingered and showed no inclination to go away. When the great lady got up at last she bestowed a kiss upon her palpitating hostess. "I am so much touched by your confidence in me, my dear," she said, and actually held out her hand to Ralph with a condescending good night. "I hope you will find your native country the best now that you have returned to it, Mr. Ravelstone," she said. Ralph was so dumbfounded that fortunately he could only reply by a bow.

But Letitia's troubles were not over even when her out-door guests were gone. There were still the visitors in the house, and the familiarity of the smoking-room, in which she was sure her brother would fully unveil himself. She made an attempt to draw him with her when the moment came for the candlesticks. "Come with me to my boudoir, Ralph," she said in her kindest note. But the monster was not to be cajoled. "Oh, I think I see myself in a bou-duar, as you call it, when there's a lot of jolly fellows waiting me." Letitia caught him by the hand sharply, though without putting her nails into it as she would have liked to do. "Mary's coming with me," she said, with the most winning notes she could bring forth. Ralph roared over her head, opening a wide cavern of a mouth in the middle of his big beard. "Mary's an—old maid," he said. As for John Parke, he had a troubled air, and cast curious glances of mingled reproach and interrogation at his wife; but he could not leave his guests in the lurch.

By the time she had escaped from the surveillance of the strangers' looks and had got half way up the stairs, Letitia had come to have one clear purpose in her mind if no more—and that was vengeance. She said to herself that all the miseries of the evening were Mary's fault; its alleviations, Lady Witheringham's kindness and her kiss of sympathy, Mrs. Parke felt she had achieved for herself—but for Ralph's appearance, unannounced, and indeed for his presence at all untimely, it was Mary that was to blame.

She paused on the stairs where the passage led off to the nursery apartments where Miss Hill, when her room was appropriated as now, found a refuge, and turning sharp round gripped Mary's hand, who was so fluttered and frightened that she made a step backward and nearly lost her balance. Letitia held her up with that grip furious and tight upon her arm. "You come with me," she said fiercely; "I've got something to say to you."

"I'd rather—hear it to-morrow," said poor Mary.

"No—to-night," said Letitia between her pale lips. She led the way to the boudoir, which indeed was a room sacred not to sulkiness but to many a conflict. It was where she received her housekeeper, her nurse, her husband when he was in the way, the homely dressmaker who helped Mrs. Parke's maid with her simple dresses, and Miss Hill—these were the privileged persons who knew and had to listen to the eloquent discourses of Letitia—and they had all a sacred horror of the boudoir. She swept into it this evening, with Mary following, and flung herself into a chair. Her eyes, not generally bright, had little flames in them. She was pale and panted for breath. After all her long repression it was an unspeakable relief to get to this sanctuary to give vent to herself, to heap wrath upon everybody who was to blame.

"Well, Mary Hill!" she cried with a snort of passion, turning upon her friend. The diamonds on her neck gave forth little quick gleams as they moved with the panting of her wrath, as if they simulated the passion which burned in their mistress's eyes.

"Well, Letitia," said the mild Mary, "I see you are very angry——"

"Have I not reason to be angry? Why on earth didn't you let me know? What motive could you have to keep it a secret? Why, for goodness' sake, didn't you tell me? I never will fathom you, Mary Hill! And to think that you should have brought this upon me without a word, without making a sign!"

"I implored you to let me speak to you, Letitia. I waited on the stairs for you——"

"Implored me—waited for me! Why, you should have forced me to hear. Do you think if it had been as important as that, I should have been content to wait on the stairs? I'd have let any one know that minded as much as you know I'd mind. If they'd

killed me I'd have let them know—and to think I've tried to be so kind to—oh, oh, Mary Hill! To think you should have stood by and seen it all and never lifted a hand!"

"What could I do?" said poor Mary. "I wasn't even there——"

"And why weren't you there? There are no risks in such a case as that; you should have dressed and come to dinner and made him take you in and kept him quiet. That's what you would have done if you had been a true friend."

"I couldn't have taken—such a liberty, when you had settled it all."

"What did it matter about my settling it all? Did I know what was going to happen? And to take the advantage just then of coming when I was out of the way! But I tell you what, Mary Hill—I blame you for more than that. You never should have let him come in at all—you never would had you been a true friend."

"Oh, Letitia, what could I do? Your own brother."

"My own brother—such a pleasant visitor, don't you think?—such a credit to us all—without even an evening coat—like a clown, like a blackguard, like a navvy—Oh, my patience!" cried Letitia, whose eyes were starting from her head and who had no patience at all. "But I know why you did it," she added after an angry pause to get breath. "Oh, I remember well enough. It's not for nothing you're an old maid, Mary Hill! Don't I know that you've had him in your mind all the while?"

Mary, though she was so mild, was being driven beyond the power of self-restraint. She was all the more easily shaken, perhaps, that there was a certain truth in it. It was true that Ralph Ravelstone had never been forgotten, and that his shadow had come between her and the only marriage she had ever had it in her power to make—but not, oh, not as he appeared now.

"I think," she said with some gentle dignity, "that it is very improper of you to say anything of the kind. If I am an old maid it's at least by my own will, and not because I could not help it." Mary was very mild, and yet she felt that, standing upon the platform of that proposal which was the one instance past in her life of the last years, it was hard to be assailed as an old maid by one who knew her so well.

Letitia stood for a moment surprised—scarcely believing her ears. That Mary should have turned upon her! It was like the

proverbial worm that sometimes at unexpected moments will turn when nobody is thinking of it. "I know as well as you do that you refused a good offer. What was it made you do it? Oh, I can see through you, though you don't think so. I always suspected it, and now I know it. But what did you expect to gain by bringing him here? Why should he be brought here? If you had ever told me—if I had known! A man who has been ten years in the bush—a man with a hand like that, and not an evening coat! Oh, Mary, you that I have always been so kind to, how could I ever have expected such a thing of you."

Tears of rage came to the relief of Letitia's overburdened soul. But she suddenly regained command of herself in a moment, dried her eyes and turned to the door. It was now her own part to stand on the defensive, to prepare to give explanations and excuses. There was no mistaking the step which was approaching, the heavy step of the outraged husband, he who had never even heard of Ralph's existence. John Parke was not a man before whom his wife was accustomed to tremble. But she did not know what John might be about to pour forth upon her now.

CHAPTER VII.

JOHN came into the room with gloom upon his countenance, and a frown upon his noble brow. Letitia had arrested the course of her own passion—she had dried her eyes, and dropped her voice, and prepared herself to meet him with a real apprehension. It was not often that she was afraid of John, but for once there was no doubt that if John was in the mind to find fault he had a sufficient reason. The sight of her husband's troubled face checked her anger and dried up the tears of vexation that had been in her eyes. She gave Mary an appealing look, and made her a motion to sit down by her. It went through her mind quickly that Mary might make a little stand for Ralph when she could not do it herself, and thus break the edge of the assault. If John could be made to see that Ralph was Mary's old sweetheart, that it was Mary's indiscretion which had brought him there, it would be easier in every way to manage the dilemma. John came in with his heavy step and his countenance overcast, but he looked like a man perplexed rather than angry, and as he

came forward it was apparent that he held a telegram in his hand.

"Look here," he said, "Letitia, here is a bore: just when we have got the house full to the door: look at that—that he should choose this time of all others for the visit that has been spoken of so long!"

"John," said Letitia, with a gasp, "I never meant him to come here."

"You never meant Frogmore to come here?"

"Frogmore?" she said, with a sort of wondering obtuseness. She was never stupid, and it made John angry, because he was quite unaccustomed to be misunderstood.

"You had better look at the telegram," he said impatiently. "I don't pretend to know what you mean. Here is the house crammed with men, and my brother, for the first time since we have been married, proposes a visit. What are we to do?"

It took Letitia some time to understand; her mind was so preoccupied by the other subject that she could not distract her thoughts from it. Frogmore—Frogmore or Ralph—which was it? She tried to shake herself together and grasp the sense of the words at which she was gazing.

"Could come to you to-morrow for three or four days, if it suits you.

"FROGMORE."

"Was there ever such a bore?" John continued saying. "The first time he has proposed to come. And we've got the house crammed, and not a corner to put him in. What am I to do?"

"Frogmore!" Letitia murmured again to herself; and John went on saying, with a monotony which is natural to many men, the same burden of regret: "The house full of men, and not a corner to put him in"—as if, in some way, the repeated statement of that fact might make a change.

"I don't know what you are thinking of," said Letitia at length, with much relief in the sense that her own brother would be forgotten in the importance of his. "Of course Frogmore must come, and there is an end of it. I hope you answered his telegram at once."

"How could I answer the telegram—when the house is crowded with men and we have not a——"

"Yes, yes," she said, "we know all that. Of course he must come. If I should have to give him my own room of course he must come. There are so many things I want done. It would be tempting Providence to refuse Frogmore. I want a new nursery, and a cottage for the gardener, and I don't know how many things. You had better write a telegram, and give it to Saunders to be sent the first thing in the morning."

"But, Letitia, when you know the house is crowded, and there is not a——"

"Oh, don't bother me," said Letitia, "as if I had not enough without that! It is not a corner that will do for Frogmore. He must have, of course, the best room in the house. For goodness' sake, John, go back to your men in the smoking-room, and tell them you have a very bad account of the covers, and that there are no birds to speak of. Say you're dreadfully sorry, and that you find you've asked them on false pretences."

"But——" said John. "Why, Letitia! I have heard nothing of the kind."

"I have, then," she said. "They didn't like to tell you—scarcely a bird. Those sorts of accidents will happen. Go and tell them. Say you don't know what to make of it."

"I don't, indeed," said John; "I can't understand it. Martin never said a word to me on the subject. That's bad news, indeed. The men will think—I don't know what they will think." He turned to go away, looking more gloomy than ever: but when he got to the door of the boudoir turned round for a moment. "That brother of yours," he said, "is a very queer fish."

"Ralph? Oh, goodness gracious, do you think it's necessary to tell me that?"

"He's a very queer fish," said John, with a laugh. "Those fellows are drawing him out. He is telling them all kinds of bush stories. I don't believe half of them are true. Why did you never tell me you had a brother in the bush?"

"I thought he was dead," she said. "I wish he had been dead before he came here. If I had only been at home it never would have happened. What's the good of you, a man, if you can't turn a fellow like that out of the house?"

John turned round upon her with amazement. "My wife's brother!" he said.

"I don't want to think of him as my brother. For goodness' sake, if you want me to have any peace, turn him out of the house."

"Letitia," said John, "in most things you have your own way, and if you like to do a nasty thing yourself I never interfere; but as for turning your brother out of my house——"

"I'm ready to give up even my own comfort to your brother," she said.

John stood for a moment, feeling that there was something strained in the parallel—but not quite clever enough to perceive what it was. "Oh, as for that!" he said vaguely. Then he gave it up, the puzzle being too much for him. "And so would I," he said, "do a great deal to please you, Letitia, but I can't turn a man out of my house. If you have nothing more to say than that, I'll go and tell those fellows about the birds."

Letitia sat clenching her hands to keep 'in her wrath until he had closed the door, and his heavy foot sounded remote and far off as he went down the stairs. She then turned to Mary, who had made several attempts to go away, but had been restrained by a gesture more and more imperative at every move she made. "Mary, I hope you know how much you owe me," she said.

"You have been very—kind, Letitia," said Mary, faltering.

"You've been no expense to your father and mother for a whole year, not even for dress. You know there's not many friends would do that."

Mary hung her head and made no reply. She had not the courage to say that she had done something in return—scarcely even to think so, being very humble-minded—and yet—— It was not generous to remind her so often of what was done for her, and the gratitude thus called for would not form itself into words.

"Well, now, you must do something for me. You must get Ralph out of this house."

"I?" said Mary, in dismay.

"Yes, you. He came for you. Don't deny it, for I am sure of it. What else would have brought him here? He and I were never friends. He knew I wouldn't have him at any price, but

he thought that through you, as you were always his sweet-heart——”

“I never was anything to Ralph—never! He went away without so much as saying good-bye,” Mary said with indignation.

“That proves exactly what I say. If he had been nothing to you, you would not have remembered that he went away without saying good-bye. You needn’t try to deceive me, Mary. Now you must get him out of this house.”

“Oh, Tisch!” said Mary, in forgetfulness of all injunctions. Their youth together and all its incidents came rushing back upon her mind. “Oh,” she said, “if you will remember, mother was kind to you then. Oh, don’t you remember how often you were all at the Vicarage then? Oh, Letitia, I beg your pardon; I didn’t mean to say that, but don’t—don’t be so hard upon me now!”

Letitia rose up with her eyes and her diamonds sending forth kindred gleams. “Do you dare to compare your mother’s kindness with mine?” she said. “What was it?—a bit of cake to a child—and I’ve taken all your expenses off them for a whole year. Where did you get that dress you are wearing, Mary Hill? Who is it that keeps a roof over your head and a fire in your room, and everything as comfortable as if you were a duke’s daughter? Your mother kind to me? I wonder you dare to look me in the face.”

But, indeed, poor Mary did not look her in the face. She had put down her head in her hands, beaten by this storm. Though it was but the most timid reprisals, Mary felt that it was ungenerous to speak of her mother’s kindness—and, after all, was not Letitia right? for there never had been much in the Vicarage to give. And it was true about the dress—it was that dyed silk which Mrs. Parke had given her, a silk richer than anything poor Mary would have bought for herself. It was true, also, about the fire in the bedroom, which was a luxury impossible in the Vicarage. It might not be generous to remind her of these things, but still it was true.

Letitia drew an angry breath of relief. She sat down again with the satisfaction of one who has achieved a logical triumph and silenced an adversary. “Look here,” she said, “I don’t think anything can be done to-night. We must just leave it.

He's done as much harm as he can. But if Lord Frogmore were to come to-morrow and find Ralph I should die. That is all about it. I should just die, rather than let that horrid old man see my brother in a velveteen coat, like a gamekeeper, and with the manners of a groom. I'd—take choral, or something. Now you know! I can't bear it, and I won't bear it. The Parkes were never very nice to me. And that old man as good as said—No, I will not bear it, Mary Hill. If he comes before Ralph is gone I shall be found dead in my bed, and you will be answerable, for without you he never could have got admission here."

"Oh, Letitia! don't say such dreadful things," cried Mary, raising a horror-stricken face.

"No, I shall not say them, but I shall do them," said Mrs. Parke. She was like one who has given a final decision, as she gathered up in her hands the train of her heavy velvet dress. "Good-night," she said; "I may never say it again!"

"Letitia!" Mary's horror and trouble could find no words.

"I can't think—that you'd kiss me like Judas—and mean to kill me all the same," said the possible martyr, withdrawing within the curtains which screened the door of her bedchamber. She heard the still more horror-stricken tone of Mary's protest, "Oh, Letitia!" as she disappeared. Mrs. Parke was not afraid of a bold simile. She dropped her excitement as she dropped her velvet skirt, as soon as the door had closed upon her, and submitted herself to the hands of her maid with much calm. She had not the least doubt that Mary would lie awake all night, trembling over that threat, and that in the morning, by some means or other, her commands would be done.

Mary fulfilled these prognostications to the letter. She never closed her eyes all night, but pictured to herself all the horrors of suicide; the discovery of what had happened; the guilt of which she would never feel herself free all her life. She said to herself, indeed, a hundred times that people who threaten such dreadful acts never perform them, but then reflected that many people had taken comfort from such a thought and then found themselves confronted by a horrible fact contradicting everything. It might be folly for a hundred times, yet if once it should come true! Mary, who had never seen old Lord Frogmore, figured to

herself a sneering, dreadful old man, whose satirical looks would be enough to make life intolerable. She had read of such men in books, and specially of the relations of the husband, who would pursue with rancour or contempt a wife whom they did not approve. She went over it so often in her waking dreams that she seemed to see the dreadful old cynic whose very glance would be like a sharp arrow. Poor Letitia! It was bad enough to have a brother like Ralph without exhibiting him at his very worst to the old lord. Though the sight of the man, who had once been her hero, in his fallen state was dreadful to poor Mary, it became more and more plain to her that she must see him; that she must even ask him to see her, and execute Letitia's will and clear this obstacle out of her friend's path, even if she herself were to die of it, as Letitia threatened she would. Mary's heart jumped up in her throat and beat like a fluttering bird as if it would escape altogether from her bosom at the thought. How was she to speak to him, to argue with him, to persuade him? What words could she find to bid him leave his sister's house and never show himself there again? Poor Ralph! Her tender heart pitied him too—he was a terrible apparition, shaming the past, a scare and horror in the present, but what could be so dreadful for a man coming back after so many years as to be disowned and turned away by his nearest relations—to be forbidden his sister's house? Mary thought, but with a thrill of horror, what she would have done had he been her own brother, or if Will or Harry should come back like that. What misery would be so dreadful, what misfortune so terrible! But Mary knew well that she would never turn her back upon "the boys" whatever happened. The worse things were, they would have the more need of her. She would stand up for them, cover their faults, invent virtues for them if they had not any, make everybody but herself believe that they were guiltless. Oh! nobody should say a word against those who were dear to her—no one! not husband nor husband's kin—no one, not even if it was the Queen herself. Mary said this to herself with a burst of generous indignation—and then her heart sank down, down into the depths, thinking of Letitia's threat, of Letitia perhaps, possibly—if it were only possible that was bad enough—doing what she said! And the horror in the morning; the little children weeping, John Park confounded, not knowing what to think, looking dully at the bed.

Mary got up in the horror of this thought in the dusk of the October morning, before daylight. She heard with a tremor that Mrs. Parke was not very well, was not coming downstairs, but was consoled by the sight of the plentiful breakfast which was being carried up to Letitia. Her maid would not have carried up a breakfast like that if there had been anything wrong; and besides, nothing would have gone wrong so far, for there had been no time as yet for sending Ralph away. The dreadful thing was that he did not appear to breakfast, any more than his sister. Mary, as she sat behind the tea urn, heard the gentlemen laughing over the previous night. They were sure the bushman would not come up to the scratch this morning, they said. If he appeared in time for lunch that would be all that could be looked for. Mary, listening with an anxiety which she could scarcely conceal, soon discovered that one at least of the guests was going away, called, as he said, by sudden business. If Ralph did not come down till luncheon what should she do? Lord Frogmore might come early, he might meet the prodigal brother—and then! Mary trembled from head to foot. She said to herself that it was folly, that nothing would happen, that Letitia was not that kind—and then she said to herself who could tell, who knows what might happen? By dint of thinking one thing and another her brain was in a whirl. What was she to do?

Sometimes it happens that by dint of mere terror a coward will do a more daring thing than the bravest person would undertake in command of his faculties. Mary ended by sending to Ralph, while he was still sleeping off the whisky of the smoking-room, a note with these words:

“DEAR RALPH,—I must speak to you. Come to me, for God’s sake, in the garden by the sundial at twelve o’clock. It may be a matter of life and death.”

She sent this up after breakfast, and for a little while Mary was more calm. At least she would do what she could for Letitia. For herself, and for what he might think of her, or how he might pronounce on her summons, she thought nothing at all.

(To be continued.)

Sicilian Sketches.

By CHARLES P. DAWSON.

No. I.

I WAS up on deck in the morning at five o'clock to watch our entry into the harbour of Palermo. The moon was shining brilliantly over the island and the sleeping city, making a glorious path across the water. Monte Pellegrino looked grim and massive, standing sentinel at the entrance to the bay on our right ; a few twinkling lights showed where Palermo lay, and on the left the mountains stood bathed in moonlight. It was some time before we were able to land ; meanwhile the "sveglié" were sounding from the different barracks to wake the sleeping soldiers from their hard beds.

"The breezes freshen towards the night,
Nor doth the moon refuse
Her guiding lamp : its tremulous light
The glancing deep bestrews." *

But soon the moon began to grow paler and the Eastern sky more red.

"The day was overcoming the breeze of morning, which fled before it, so that from afar I saw the tremulous ruffling of the sea."† Night and day seemed trembling as in a balance. By the time we had landed the day had asserted its right ; the moon faded away, and the sun rose red and triumphant from the sea.

The next day, though cloudy, was fine, and the wind was from the south. At ten o'clock we threaded our way through the crowded streets to the Duomo, a striking-looking building outside, of yellow sandstone and of immense varieties of architecture. In the centre is a modern cupola, a production of the last century quite out of keeping with the rest of the building. Swinburne mentions in his "Travels" (1777) that "the whole

* Virgil, "Æn.," vii. 9.

† Dante, "Purg.," c. i., 115, 117.

cathedral is in a tottering condition and calls for speedy assistance. A plan for rebuilding great part of it has been given in by M. Fuga, the king's architect, who proposes to raise a cupola, and refit it entirely in the modern taste." A refitting which was, alas! only too perfectly carried out. On the south side of the Duomo is an immense piazza, filled with palms and shrubs and inclosed by a stone balustrade with marble figures of saints upon it, so that one sees the church itself to the greatest advantage. The style of the architecture is a curious mixture of Arabo-Byzantine, cast in a Gothic mould, and here and there are Cuphic inscriptions, and in one or two instances texts from the Koran are to be found, showing that some of the stones must have come from a mosque. The interior is white and lifeless, and has been entirely modernized by M. Fuga in the last century, making the church uninteresting. But at the west end, in a chapel apart, are huge porphyry sarcophagi of the greatest interest, where sleep Roger II.,* first crowned king of Sicily; Constance, his daughter, mother of the Emperor Frederic II.,† that half-pagan, half-Christian, but perhaps more truly free-thinking prince—a nineteenth century intellect born out of due time—who here too awaits his judgment, as well as Henry VI., his father, and Constance of Arragon,‡ his first wife.

The city, as it is called, of Monreale, with its wonderful cathedral, stands high above the plain of the Conca d'Oro, of which we had a lovely view, with its groves of oranges and lemons, olive and almond trees, Palermo lying white upon the edge of the blue sea, and backed up on the east by mountains in endless chains melting away on the left into the horizon and the sea. The cathedral of Monreale was built by King William II. in the twelfth century as fulfilment of a vow, and it became a famous Benedictine establishment.

On entering the church a most glorious sight bursts upon one, for from roof to floor every inch is covered with beautiful mosaics on a gold ground. It is impossible to do justice in words to this unique and lovely building, so little dimmed by time or marred by restoration, and the interior left an impression on my mind of splendour and simplicity. Whilst I was there the choir was

* 1154.

† 1250.

‡ 1222.

practising in a part of the church shut off from the main building, and the sad and long-drawn cadences of the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and the Psalms which were being practised for the coming Holy Week, added greatly to the whole effect, sounding like Dante's description of the souls in purgatory, as yet shut out from, but praying to be admitted to, the glorious Paradise of the Church within.

Towards the end of the day and an hour before sunset we took our way to the celebrated Catacombs of the Cappuccini Monastery, which are situated a little outside the walls of Palermo and not far from the villa of La Cuba—an appropriate ending for a day in which we had seen all that the wealth, pomp and vanity as well as genius of mortal man could achieve. Descending a staircase and conducted by a monk, we came into a veritable assembly of the dead. Death in all its grotesque hideousness and in its most ghastly forms. I had seen the dead monks at the Cappuccini Monastery in Rome, some years ago: there they were by dozens, here by thousands; not only monks and priests, but men and women of all ages, ranks and conditions, and even babies, princes, priests and peasants. Passages upon passages opened out to view, with chests of dead, glass cases of dead, coffins of dead; skeletons lying upon shelves, others attached upright against the walls, as close as may be to each other: here with skull bowed down on breast, there with head erect twisted strangely round to right or left. Some with shock heads of hair, others with dried skin like parchment—for the bodies are baked—and some again with remnants of their sightless eyes. One in a glass casket especially attracted my attention—a young man who in life had evidently thought much of his personal appearance, with the sproutings on his chin and lip of a once highly cherished beard and moustache. Could he but see the shell out of which his frivolous spirit had escaped, he would wonder at the labour and time he had bestowed upon it. Some there were clad in black, high up, attached against the wall, their hands covered with white kid gloves, who appeared to have come back from some carouse together, some deathly banquet, their heads turned towards each other with a horrid grin, as if conversing of their late repast—one of them indeed had still a black tongue lolling 'twixt his fleshless jaws. Some looked at one threateningly, some enticingly, others jocosely, while more than one

seemed in truly speechless agony, so horribly contorted were their mouths. Skeletons there were hanging up so old and tottering that I feared lest they might tumble down upon me and clutch me in a charnel-house embrace. The babies must have been embalmed, I think, for most of them still looked round and plump, except where the little face had fallen forwards, and revealed a tiny grinning skull behind. Here were evidences of a mother's tender love, for in some cases a silver rattle, a little toy or doll was clasped in small and bony fingers, the playthings of the child in life. Indeed I heard of mothers who come here on the anniversaries of their children's deaths to dress the remains anew. Some passages contained none but women, others none but priests, birettas on their heads and stoles around their bony necks; one in a scarlet cap and tippet must have been a cardinal, I suppose. But of all this ghastly crew there still stands out one in horror preëminently above the rest; a perfect skeleton all but his head, which was twisted round to the right and on which still lingered dried skin drawn very tight, his mouth wide open and his dusty eyes staring sightlessly, and on his head a shock of thick red hair, with such an awful expression on his face of hatred and defiance, that he seemed to hurl curses and maledictions on death and on all his companions. Daylight was beginning to wane ere I left this gallery of mortality, and in the somewhat uncertain light I could almost fancy that I saw the skeletons waving their arms and beckoning me to come and take up my abode amongst them. I was on the point of leaving and was taking a glance behind me when something leapt to the floor close by and scuttled away into the darkness beyond. Scarcely able to repress an exclamation I hurried away and up again into what remained of the blessed light of day, muttering a Requiescant in Pace.

No. II.

THE line of rail by which we went to Cefalù (κεφαλὴ) runs for the most part by the sea, through a tangle of wild geraniums, with here and there olive trees, vines, and groves of oranges and lemons. The town itself is little more than a large fishing village, and lying at the foot of a steep cliff, on which are the remains of

a Saracenic fortification. But the great church built by King Roger is wonderful, though in a terrible state of neglect and more horribly dirty than any church I ever saw before, even in Italy, which is saying a great deal.

The façade is plain but striking, with three pointed arches forming an atrium at the west end, and flanked by two towers with small spires. The interior of the church resembles to a certain extent the cathedral of Monreale, but here the nave has been whitewashed and only in the apse and choir are there any mosaics remaining. Those that are left are very magnificent. A royal "throne place" occupies the usual position opposite the Bishop's chair, as at Monreale, being also a royal foundation; to indicate which, two dirty old prints in rickety frames of Umberto and Margherita are hung above it. A half-length figure of the Saviour in mosaic fills up the chord of the apse and broods sorrowfully over the whole. This concisely-worded inscription is placed beneath: "Factus homo, Factor hominis, factique Redemptor, Judico corporeus, corpora corda Deus." The Lenten veil once used in the Sarum rite, and still in that of Armenia, here hung in front of the High Altar, and partly obscured the awful foulness of the sanctuary.

We went to a small inn, Albergo d'Italia, and I was shown up into a room (lighted from above by a broken window), dreadfully dirty, and in the corner of which on an unmade bed sat a half-dressed youth, in a pink shirt, red tie, and towzled hair, twanging a guitar. He saluted me politely and easily without moving, and twanged melodiously away in that irresponsible manner peculiar to the sunny south. I suppose I was intended to eat my food in this room as the best the inn afforded, but I declined that honour, and politely saluting the youth in return, retired and ate a foul repast in a very malodorous, but upon the whole less dirty room, in a Trattoria below.

The only clean place in Cefalù was the main street, where I was sorry we had not eaten our food. We afterwards walked up the hill to see the Saracenic fortifications. On the side immediately below the summit is a small temple, said to be a relic of Pelasgic times—the only one in Sicily, and reminding one feebly of the temples in Egypt.

We got back to Palermo late in the evening. Near Casteldaccio, a station which we passed on our return, a few days

ago the mail train from Messina was stopped at night by brigands and robbed of 50,000 francs.

The day we left for Girgenti we had to be up at four in the morning. The country through which one passes is uninteresting and ugly, and dedicated as of old to Ceres. The only trees to be seen are stunted olives and a few eucalyptus about the stations. Girgenti itself is like a town in Palestine or Syria at first sight, and is in a magnificent situation overlooking an undulating plain and slope towards the sea. The temples stand on what was originally the outer portion of the city of Akragas, a little lower down than the modern town, and make a beautiful feature in the foreground amidst the fresh green of almond trees and corn, bounded by a horizon of deep blue sparkling sea. On the way to the temples one passes a curious little church, now dedicated to S. Niccolò, and once belonging to the Franciscan order. The interior seems to indicate that it was originally a classical building, possibly a temple, though long ago arranged for Christian worship; on one side is an altar with votive offerings of waxen limbs, some of which are startlingly realistic. The most perfect of the temples still remaining is that of Concord, of Dòric architecture, and built of yellow sandstone in which are imbedded a quantity of shells. During the Middle Ages it had been used as a church, that of San Gregorio. The old city walls are here to be seen in parts, and are perforated with "loculi" for the dead. "Arduus inde Akragas ostentat, maxima longe, Mœnia," &c., writes Virgil in the third book of the "*Æneid*," but when he continues, "magnanimùm quondam generator equorum," we cannot follow him, for the present race of horses both at Girgenti and elsewhere in Sicily does not merit any eulogy. Further on is the temple of Juno Lacinia, a dedication most appropriate to modern Sicily, for I find that Lacinia is derived from *Λακίνιος*, an ancient classic brigand slain by Hercules; so temples to Juno under this title were raised as thanksgivings for the deliverance from the pest (*vide* Diodorus Siculus, iv. 24). In turn I visited all the other remaining temples, and came back to the inn just as the sun was setting and bathing the landscape in a deep purple hue.

The day following we went up into the city and saw what little there is of interest. The cathedral is immense and bare, and remarkable only for a beautiful Greek sarcophagus, and an

extraordinary echo in the nave and western end of the church, which in years gone by caused a confessional scandal, the slightest whisper being heard distinctly all over the church. However, the confessionals have all been removed into one corner of the building where I suppose there is no echo. Apropos of the confessionals, this being Lent they are thronged with penitents, both men and women, all day long vociferously and with much gesticulation telling their sins. At Palermo I saw a man on his knees before a capuchin having a lengthy and noisy argument; the friar would not give in, however, and only shook his head and smiled. The Sicilians are still children of nature, and have not yet added the 11th commandment to the Decalogue, "Thou shalt not be found out," for they are utterly regardless of what people think. But then in Sicily there is no Mrs. Grundy to keep an eye upon them.

NO. III.

THE country through which the railway passes from Girgenti to Catania is oppressively ugly, bare, desolate, and treeless. There is but little cultivation, and the country seems chiefly given up to sulphur pits and the industry connected with the trade. One passes by Castro-Giovanni, the ancient Enna; the town is high up and perched above upon a rocky mountain. But I saw no fields of flowers, and the only representative of Persephone was an aged crone culling herbs amongst the rocks. The groves, the lakes, the flowers described by Cicero have long since disappeared; the only thing that remains as of old is the precipitous hill on which the town stands. As we approached closer to Etna the clouds which had been down upon the mountains all day lifted a little, so that we saw the snow-clad peak, smoking and gloomy, with its lower fields of black lava infernal and horrible; dark clouds flitting across the white snow made the mountain look still more mysterious and weird.

It was very wet all night, and in the morning the whole of Catania was enveloped in a thick vaporious mist. As usual, we paid our first visit to the cathedral, dedicated to St. Agatha, the patron saint of the city. Originally a Norman structure, as the exterior part of the apses testifies, it has been restored in the Renaissance style, and is bare, white, and hideous. The shrine

of St. Agatha is only shown three times a year, so we did not see it; an immense silver lamp hangs in front of the closed doors, and is so enormous that I think at least three people could bathe in it comfortably. Another and more modern shrine stands near the entrance of the church, that of Bellini, the composer of the "Sonambula" and "Norma," a native of Catania, and on the white marble tomb are engraved in golden letters the first words and bars of "Ah non credea mirarti." A great broad street runs the whole length of the city, nearly two miles, and is called "Strada Stesicoro-Etna"—Stesicoro from the Sicilian poet who flourished, as they say in Biographical Dictionaries, B.C. 632, and Etna from the great mountain which completes the vista at the end of the street, at once the pride and terror of the inhabitants of Catania. The squalor of the city is unutterable; many of the streets have never been paved, and have the black lava, brought by the eruption of 1693, sticking up in all directions. Catania is at least a century behind the rest of Italy in cleanliness and civilization. I did not see here, as elsewhere in Sicily, black bands fixed on the shutters of shops, labelled pathetically, "Perla mia suocera" ("For my mother-in-law"), or otherwise as the case may be, but as a curious specimen of Sicilian mourning I saw a funeral car painted red, gold, and blue, with a scarlet pall edged with yellow upon the coffin. Of course we saw the excavated Greek theatre, which from its awkward semi-underground position conveys little impression to the uninitiated, beyond that of gruesomeness and humidity. A little above the city stands the huge convent of San Benedetto, once a magnificent monastic institution, now given up to schools and in a state of savage disrepair. The church belonging to it is large and ugly, having an unfinished façade, and inside it is bare and white, like the cathedral, with handsome marble altars and frightful pictures. A small organ, so old and primitive that it might have been made by Jubal as an experiment, stood in one of the transepts, and over the high altar was another and more modern instrument, said to be very fine. Not far from this convent is the Carcere, or Prison of St. Agatha, where she was kept before her martyrdom—a dreary and neglected old building with a magnificent doorway in white marble of Lombardo-Gothic design. The prison itself is in a side chapel, malodorous and dark. In the sacristy Nature had taken pity upon this neglected place, and maidenhair in honour

of the maiden martyr grew profusely. St. Agatha suffered under the Emperor Decius, A.D. 251.

Towards sunset we drove up the hill in the direction of Etna, to a Villa San Giuliano, in the vain hope of seeing a view; the garden of the villa would have been lovely had not the recent rains almost entirely destroyed it, and the view no doubt glorious had not the whole landscape been enveloped in mist.

It was a lovely sunny afternoon that we set out to drive to Aci Castello and Aci Reale. The former is most picturesque, with an old castle on an isolated rock washed by the sea. Not far from this place are some fantastic little rocks, called the "Faraglioni," of black lava covered with vegetation, and a little further up the coast the famous "Scogli dei Ciclopi," stones and rocks hurled at Ulysses by Polyphemus. Whether hurled at Ulysses or not, they were undoubtedly vomited forth by the volcanic agency of the one-eyed monster Etna, being, like the Faraglioni, of black lava; hence no doubt the legend of Polyphemus. Aci Reale is a handsome town with broad streets and several fine churches. It is here that Acis and Galatea were said to have disported themselves till interrupted by Polyphemus, and the stream into which Acis was changed is said to flow into the sea close by. A modern Acis and Galatea were wooing in the Public Gardens, where I sat for some time, and an old dame, the mother of Galatea I presume, stood in front of them when they kissed to shield them from my view. Acis had the air of a martyr who submits, rather than that of an ardent lover, but then there was no Polyphemus by to make him jealous. By the time we were ready to return the clouds had completely lifted from Etna, and we had a splendid view of the giant mountain, covered with snow and sending out clouds of smoke. All along the coast are gigantic blocks of lava lying in endless confusion amongst tangles of shrubs and flowers, and just now the earth is covered with lupins blue and white, pink silene and the gold flower of Theocritus.

No. IV.

I WAS truly thankful to leave Catania, which I consider one of the most unpleasant places I ever was unfortunate enough to visit. The climate is hot and unwholesome, the city dirty and repulsive, and the people and their manners foul and unattrac-

tive. About the middle of the day the train left for Syracuse, in which, and in a very bad temper, I also left, having been made to pay a most exorbitant bill at the hotel.

The wind was blowing a hurricane, and the sky was copper-coloured and the air full of sand. We passed by a small lake, Lentini was its name I think, and arrived at the hotel about 5.30. In my bedroom, which had never been cleaned within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, I found that neither door nor window would shut, so on going to bed I fastened the one with a chair and the other with a pair of scissors. Syracuse was no doubt once a pearl amongst cities—it must now be described as a black pearl, if one at all. It is chiefly remarkable for its dirt. The next day was brilliantly fine, but a fearful wind was blowing and did not add to one's comfort as we drove about to see the principal sights of the place. It would take almost as long to describe what we saw as it took to see it, so I will content myself with saying that what struck me most was the *Latomiæ*, or quarries, which were chiefly used as prisons for captives taken in war, notably the *Latomiæ dei Cappuccini*, where, B.C. 415, the Athenians captured perished to the number of 7,000. Now the quarries are beautiful with shrubs, creepers and flowers, and tell no tale of the horrors they have witnessed. The *Latomia*, which contains the wonderful so-called *Dionysius's Ear*, is very remarkable, and the echo still more so, being especially extraordinary when any one whispers or tears a bit of paper; the latter then sounds like a succession of reports of a pistol. Of course there is a Greek theatre, beautifully situated on the side of a hill and not far from the Roman Amphitheatre, also finely placed, with views of Syracuse, now confined to the island of *Ortygia* and the land-locked harbour beyond. I am sorry to say I missed the interesting church of *San Giovanni* owing to my ignorance; *Epipolæ* also was too far distant, as I had only one day to give to Syracuse. We, however, rowed up the river *Anapus* as far as the deep blue pool where the *Cyane* rises, and which is fabled to cover the entrance to *Hades*. *Papyrus* grows luxuriantly on either side the river, and returning to that "city of pride, Beside whose walls *Anapus* waters glide," we cut some plants to carry away as a memorial.

The wind had abated and it was lovely, when the next day we left Syracuse for *Taormina*.

There is a long winding road up to the town, which stands a thousand feet above the sea. It is an exquisite place and well merits the praises bestowed upon it by artists and travellers. The town itself is very picturesque, with charming old Gothic doorways to be seen here and there both in the churches and houses. The Belle Vue Hotel has perhaps the best view of all the inns in the place. A vast stretch of blue sea, of shore, of valleys and ridge upon ridge ending in Etna covered with snow, and alas! generally with clouds. I wandered up the hills at the back of the town to get a better view of the whole place. The sun was near setting in a golden blaze behind the mountains and gilding the snow and the clouds upon Etna. It was very still and quiet after noisy Syracuse; the tinkling of goat-bells, the sound of waterfalls, humming-bird moths busy collecting their food from the asphodel on the hillside, alone varied the profound stillness of everything around.

However, during the evening there was noise enough in the inn, for the servants danced the Tarentella to the sound of mandolines, which demoralized the old padrone to such an extent that he fell to and beat his wife unmercifully, so that we had at last to interfere—an interference received by the others with shrugs of their shoulders and the eternal "Come si fà?" or, "What will you?"

One morning early I walked up to the Greek theatre which crowns the further extremity of the town—a position unrivalled for beauty—and perhaps the theatre is even more lovely now in its ruined state than when in its magnificence it resounded to the tragedies of Æschylus. Imagine, then, a cloudless sky, a brilliant sun, the theatre partly of mellowed bricks, partly of grey stone, the stage end very perfect, with niches and columns still some remaining, the semicircle of the spectators' seats in not so good a state of preservation but overgrown with grass and flowers, and here and there a large aloe shooting up its blue-green spikes—the whole perched upon a precipitous rock high above its surroundings and looking down upon the sea and coast, mountain and valley, and far away upon the south-west Etna, lofty and supreme, in a mantle of pure white snow. Imagine it all if you can, and you have a picture that suggests the garden of Mohammed's paradise, which "satisfies but satiates not."

One would wish to linger here, but now-a-days everybody is in

a hurry, and, like the poor spirits in Dante's Purgatory, we are goaded on. A party of fifth-rate Germans came to the hotel in the evening, and talked, sang, danced, recited, shouted and ranted to such an extent that I was thankful when, owing to their powerful potations, they tumbled helplessly to bed.

After five days at Taormina I left it with great regret, for, with the exception perhaps of Palermo, it is the only place in Sicily I should care to re-visit. The day following we left Messina in the good boat "Galileo" for Naples, and passing safely 'twixt Scylla and Charybdis—"Dextrum Scylla latus, lævum implacata Charybdis"—we soon left Sicily's fair isle behind, which before long was hidden from view by gathering mists and the approach of night.

The Odd Number.

BY CONSTANCE SMITH,

Author of "THE REPENTANCE OF PAUL WENTWORTH."

CHAPTER I.

THE playgoing world was greatly concerned to hear that Mrs. Craven had fallen ill at the very outset of the London season ; and when it was noised abroad that the popular actress was suffering from a sharp attack of rheumatic fever, which would probably disable her from appearing in public for weeks, and even months to come, its concern deepened into distress. What would now be the fate of the promised new play at the Palladium, in which she was to have "created" the part of the heroine? Would Mr. Hale be compelled to postpone its production—on which, it was currently reported, he had bestowed much labour and expended vast sums of money—for an indefinite period? The morning papers decided that Mr. Hale could hardly do otherwise ; but for once they were in the wrong. Out came a notice announcing that, in spite of the regrettable illness of Mrs. Craven, the new drama would be given on the day already fixed, "the part of the Princess Margaret being played by Miss Beatrice Heriot."

At this the dramatic critics began to wag their heads in ominous foreboding. In terrible concert did they, one and all, predict dismal failure for the untried piece and merited discomfiture for the actor-manager who was so infatuated as to require a mere girl (who had never played a leading part in her life) to sustain a *role* that would assuredly have taxed all the resources of Mrs. Craven's mature and well-trained genius. Sensible Richard Hale must have lost his head before he ventured so to defy common-sense and experience. "What business had the woman to fall ill just now?" demanded one irascible elderly gentleman, a very Snarl among his fellows. "The play's a fine play, I tell you, and the Princess is a magnificent part—for an actress who knows

her business. But *Miss Heriot*! Good heavens! I hope Hale will be thoroughly punished for his obstinate folly; he will deserve anything he may get. The man I commiserate is Grahame, who will have to sit by and see his best piece of work made ridiculous."

"At least Miss Heriot will look the part admirably," said Mr. David Heathcote, of the *Piccadilly Gazette*, soothingly. "With her tall slight figure, and her red-gold hair (I am told that Hale wants her to wear her own hair), she ought to make a very effective Princess, as far as appearance goes. She moves well, too, and there is a certain charm about her altogether. I was a good deal struck by her acting last night." (Mr. Heathcote was a younger and more sympathetically-inclined critic than his colleague.)

"Last night!" grumbled that authority. "My dear fellow, last night Miss Heriot played a pretty little *ingénue* part in a lively comedietta rather nicely. What does that performance teach you as to her capabilities for undertaking a trying character in poetic drama? Absolutely nothing. No, Hale is experimenting wildly; and, if I were he, I should feel uncommonly nervous as to the result of my experiment."

Whether Mr. Hale felt nervous or not, it is quite certain that Miss Heriot did. During some days it would have been difficult to find, between St. Paul's and Notting Hill Gate, a more anxious young lady than the future representative of the Princess Margaret. Her mind oscillated between gratification and apprehension, trembling pride and profound self-distrust. Sometimes, reflecting on the magnitude of her undertaking, she felt almost paralyzed with terror, and but for Mr. Hale her courage might have forsaken her altogether. But his encouragement and support never failed; and while she had these, she could still fight down her fears, since who so well qualified to judge her as he? the man whom not only England but the world at large was beginning to call the first of living actors. "He ought to know," she repeated for the hundredth time, as, the last rehearsal over, she walked into her mother's drawing-room—a modest apartment in a quiet terrace just off the Bayswater Road. "And he says he is sure I shall do well, mother."

"Of course he knows," the mother replied confidently and proudly, looking up from the depths of her luxurious lounging-

chair. She was a pretty, fragile-looking woman barely past middle age—a faded likeness of the girl standing before her in the full radiance of her delicate beauty. “And you may trust him, Bee. He is so—so fond of you”—stumbling a little over the phrase, while a faint flush dyed her pale cheeks for a moment. “He would not let you run this risk unless he felt very certain of your success.”

“Oh, no, I’m sure he wouldn’t!” responded Miss Heriot, taking off her hat before a little mirror, and contemplating with silent satisfaction the red-gold hair that had found favour in the eyes of Mr. David Heathcote. The uneasy consciousness of her mother’s manner had escaped her, and her own was healthily indifferent. “I know he thinks he is doing a grand thing for me. And the promotion is really tremendous. Why, a few weeks ago the very idea of acting with him at all would have seemed an unattainable honour.”

“It is a great honour,” said the mother, watching the girl’s face with eager eyes.

“Ah!” Beatrice turned swiftly round, her mood suddenly changed. “Supposing I prove myself unworthy the honour? After all he has done for me—and for you, dear? Only think! He has been so good to us—always such a faithful, faithful friend! Whatever I do, we can never repay his goodness. And now, if I should fail and disgrace him? His judgment *may* be at fault, you know——”

“Mr. Richard Hale.”

The great actor followed close upon the little parlour-maid who announced him—a tall man of about five-and-forty, with thick dark hair already beginning to turn grey, and strongly-marked, irregular features. Handsome he certainly was not; indeed, but for his fine brow and the singular beauty of his luminous brown eyes, Richard Hale’s striking face might have been called plain. Yet it was a face “goodly to look upon,” in the best sense of the phrase: full of power, and full of kindness.

He went straight to Mrs. Heriot’s side with a smile, and took her hand in both his. “Has the Princess told you that she means to take the town by storm to-morrow night?” he inquired.

“She came in full of hope,” Mrs. Heriot smiled back; “and now ‘there comes her fit again,’ and with it waning confidence in your predictions.”

Mr. Hale wheeled rapidly round. "You and I shall quarrel over this matter, Princess. How dare you disable your manager's judgment? Seriously, now, don't you think I know something of my business?"

Miss Heriot sighed. "I always believe you, when you are by," she said. "But when you are absent I lose faith; I shrink and grow small, like the prince in the fairy tale."

Hale's eyes sparkled curiously. "I shall be close at hand to-morrow night, fortunately," he returned. "By-the-bye, I have brought you the notes you wanted. Can you make a copy now?—because I should like to take back the originals with me."

Beatrice seated herself at a writing-table in the window, and began to scribble busily, quite unconscious of the tenderness of the gaze that rested on her bent head for a brief instant, or of the half-suppressed sigh with which Mr. Hale turned to her mother, and asked—in a voice too low to reach her ear—"if the papers were ready?"

Mrs. Heriot signed an affirmative. "But," she added, in the same subdued tone, "remember, I do this unwillingly—most unwillingly, Mr. Hale. Indeed——"

"I thought," the actor interrupted impatiently, "that we had done with discussion. The thing is a mere debt, representing Heriot's rightful profits on the enterprise, had he lived till now, poor fellow."

"It pleases you to put it so," said Mrs. Heriot, between smiles and tears. "I must let it pass, I suppose. But why not wait a little?"

"Because what is easy now may be difficult to-morrow," he answered rather sharply. "You have not told her?" with a sudden flash of anger, indicating Beatrice.

"No, no!" the gentle widow hastened to assure him. "I will fetch the papers, as you wish it." She hurriedly left the room; and, at the same moment, her daughter rose from the writing-table.

"Here are your notes, Mr. Hale; I have made a rough copy. What were you and mother whispering about in such a mysterious fashion just now?"

"Nothing of any consequence: a very small matter of business." (Miss Heriot at once determined to cross-examine her mother on the subject as soon as Mr. Hale should be out of the house.)

"Did you meet Miss Henderson yesterday?" he asked abruptly, making haste to quit the dangerous topic.

"Yes." Her eyes were brimming over with laughter. "She is very angry—oh, so angry! I know she thought you would ask her to play the Princess. But"—her face growing suddenly graver—"I was really very sorry for her. Think of her confident expectation—and then of the horrible blankness of disappointment she must be feeling now!"

"Feeling she has been put out of the game, eh? Poor soul! Well, there must always be some one who gets the odd number for their share."

"The odd number?" We must take Mr. Hale's word for it in the matter of Miss Heriot's dramatic gifts, but in practical life she was certainly rather deficient in acuteness.

"Don't you remember that, in nursery games, the child to whom the odd number falls, is always the one 'out of it?' It's the same in life. For every lucky fellow who draws an even number there is usually some poor beggar who has to pocket the corresponding odd one. The analogy holds good as regards fortune, ambition, love—and a score of other things besides."

"Then I'm afraid you must be responsible for the sorrows of a number of 'poor beggars,'" quoth Beatrice merrily. "All your lots seem to turn out lucky ones."

"I'm not altogether a Polykrates; you needn't forswear my company yet," he replied. "I drew *one* odd number, at least—and I have been an outsider there, ever since."

Some vague shadowy recollection of childish days stirred in the girl's memory as he spoke—a dim remembrance of mysterious talk between her parents about some one who had been "false" to Mr. Hale—an echo of her dead father's indignant, sorrowful voice saying, "She has spoilt his life for him; he will never be the same man again."

"I did not care to tempt Fate a second time," Richard Hale continued. "In that I have no doubt I was wise. Yet now, when my youth is over, I find my wisdom forsaking me, and I am going to try my luck once more. The spell is on me, and I can't help myself."

Beatrice was utterly startled. She had never seen *that* look in Mr. Hale's eyes before—never, that is, amidst the prosaic surroundings of common life. Had he forgotten that he was not on

the stage? Was he unconsciously rehearsing his part for the following evening? anticipating the moment when the patriot-soldier, sinking at the feet of the girl-sovereign for whom fame, success, finally life itself have been sacrificed, should retort, in answer to her cry of "Why have you done all this?"—"Because I love you." She was glad that her mother's return checked all further speech on Mr. Hale's part.

Yet the memory of the little episode was not unpleasant to her. It flattered her woman's pride; it helped to salve a certain rankling wound hidden away well out of sight in her woman's heart. Why should she not take pleasure in it? She honoured and admired Mr. Hale above all men she knew, and she owed no allegiance elsewhere. What allegiance could she owe to a half-spoken, ambiguous word that had never been redeemed—a word which the speaker, even when he uttered it four years earlier, had probably never intended to redeem?

Perhaps this new source of pride helped to nerve her for her great ordeal. When, on being called for the stage, she came down the narrow staircase leading from her dressing-room, tall and beautiful in her white robes, Hale, who was waiting for her below (they were to make their entry almost simultaneously), saw at once that, though highly excited, she was no longer fearful.

"Yes, I am not a bit nervous now—not a bit," she admitted gaily. "I feel quite presumptuously cool. And I believe the tables are turned for once! Aren't *you* a little nervous to-night, Mr. Hale?"

"Perhaps I am," answered the actor, with a slight smile. "Suppose *I* do something foolish?"

It was clear, even before the opening scene was played out, that Miss Heriot, at least, was in no danger of doing anything foolish; and when the curtain fell on the first act it began to be whispered that Hale's venture bid fair to prove a success. Beatrice herself felt a thrill of conscious power. And as the play went on, and Hale—who had somehow failed to act with his customary force in the earlier scenes—warmed to his work, and surpassed anything he had ever yet done in his impersonation of the hero, the girl's quick nature seemed to catch the infection of his genius, and her acting grew every moment, not only in grace and charm, but in power. Her confidence waxed stronger; she knew that she was carrying her audience with her, and the knowledge helped

her to throw herself with increased *abandon* into her part. That she could not lose herself in it altogether was due to a feeling that Mr. Hale, on his side, was not forgetting his identity at all, and that the words and looks which roused the house to such enthusiasm were alike addressed—not to the Princess Margaret, but to Beatrice Heriot.

"It sounds impertinent to say so, but oh! Mr. Hale, you never acted quite like this before," she had ventured to whisper, as he led her back after the first tumultuous recall. And he had answered:

"Do you think so? I am glad to hear it. I was afraid I had been too much in earnest."

Well, Richard Hale had had his triumph, and the world knew that it possessed a new actress. Before that young lady could grasp fully the fact of her own success, she was being overwhelmed with congratulations and flatteries; her fellow-actors were pressing round her with kindly warmth, and people she had never seen before were begging for introductions to the coming star. She bore it all smilingly for a few minutes; then came the reaction, and she turned, white and exhausted, to Hale. "I—I cannot bear any more of this. Take me away, please."

As in a dream, she heard his words of excuse and apology—she felt him take her hand—and in a moment they were moving silently through the twilight maze behind the scenes to the foot of the steep little staircase down which she had come three hours before. She halted there an instant to smile reassuringly. "I am better now—and I shall find mother upstairs. I hope you are satisfied with me?" she added rather coquettishly.

"Satisfied!" he echoed in a deep, moved voice. A single gas-jet burning on the landing above threw its light on the two figures—on the man in his rich old-world court garb, and the girl in her white draperies gleaming with diamonds—and made their faces startlingly clear to each other. Beatrice, seeing the look in her companion's, tried to take her hand away. But his fingers closed suddenly fast upon it.

"Beatrice!" he cried in impassioned appeal—"Beatrice!" She did not reply.

"I have said it," he continued vehemently. "By every word, every look to-night, I was striving to make you understand. You knew it. And now, *now*—Beatrice! Answer me, dear!"

What answer could she give? With that grand face bending eagerly towards her, with those eloquent eyes holding hers fast—with the wondrous voice that a few moments earlier had bewitched a thousand listeners into charmed silence and made strong men of the world weep like children—pleading passionately in her ears, what answer could she give, save one? She turned quickly, putting her other hand timidly on his; and the next minute he had clasped her to his heart.

"My dearest!" he said at length, in low, broken accents, "I have waited for you so long. Seven weary years—Ah! you did not guess; I managed to keep my secret. I was so afraid of spoiling your life; I dared not hurry you into *thinking* you loved me—I wanted you to be certain of yourself. Thank God! you do love me after all. Tell me so, dear love. Let me hear it from your own sweet lips."

Again, what answer, save one, could she give him? Every fibre in her generous young nature thrilled towards him in his sublime self-forgetfulness; all personal feeling merged itself in an intensity of desire to requite him for those long years of patient, silent waiting. Surely love *had* mingled with the tide of loyalty and gratitude that swept her to his arms! She would hesitate no longer. "I do love you," she murmured, with her fair face hidden on his shoulder.

CHAPTER II.

FOR once Mr. Hale had acted on impulse; after waiting resolutely and manfully for years, he had suddenly found it impossible to wait even an hour longer. It seemed to him afterwards that he might have chosen a more fitting time for his wooing of Beatrice Heriot. Would she, at a less exciting moment, have responded quite so readily and unhesitatingly? He almost feared not. Yet, in view of the unvarying and unqualified devotion she showed him, there seemed little room left for doubt of any kind—so he soon ceased to torment himself. Could he have witnessed an interview that took place in the little Bayswater drawing-room a few days later, he might have regretted his precipitancy more bitterly.

"It is too late," he would have heard Beatrice saying in a quiet, hopeless voice. "I knew nothing of all this, Mr. Lloyd; I

believed you had forgotten all about your foolish fancy long ago. You said nothing—you wrote nothing ; so I promised to marry Mr. Hale, and I mean to keep my promise."

"Have some pity for me!" Arthur Lloyd pleaded. He was a tall, stalwart young fellow of eight-and-twenty, handsome and manly, with a fair English face bronzed by travel and the prairie sun. "I gave up everything for you, Beatrice. When my uncle cast me off, I could not come to you penniless—I could not ask you to engage yourself to a man who might never be more than a beggar. But I went to America for your sake ; I worked there for you ; the little fortune I have made—such as it is—was made for you. Every dollar I laid by I said to myself, 'For her!' And now—O God, this is too hard, too hard!"

The girl struggled desperately with her tears. "It is hard—I—I dare not talk about it. Do not imagine that I care nothing—that I don't think of what it is to you. But I must be true to *him*, whatever it costs, now."

"Do you suppose," Lloyd asked, with the magnificent confidence of youth, "that this man can possibly care for you as I do?"

"I know," she answered, not boastfully, but as one stating a simple fact, "that he has cared for me for years—before I knew you—and was too generous to tell me so, till I should have learnt to know the world. I know that I owe him everything ; that but for his help, his teaching, his beautiful patient kindness——" She broke down for a minute but recovered herself and went on : "He tended my father on his death-bed like a brother ; he has been my mother's good angel ever since. If I had refused to be his wife, and had failed—as, but for him, I *must* have failed—on the stage, my mother and I would still, by means of a generous pretext of his, have been provided for to the end of our lives!"

"All this is very noble," Lloyd allowed. "Then, being what he is, can you suppose that he would wish you to make this sacrifice? Surely if he knew——"

"If he knew, he would set me free, you mean," she interrupted. "No doubt. Therefore he shall never know. If the remembrance of one woman's treachery has gone far to spoil twenty years of his life, I at least will not help to wreck what remains of it!"

"The world will applaud your decision," said the young man bitterly. "You are almost a celebrity yourself now, and it is quite right that you should have a celebrated husband. I am a

very undistinguished person indeed, with little enough to offer you in any way, Heaven knows ! But I did not mean to hurt you, Beatrice ; forgive me ! ”

“ I will forgive you,” she answered, “ on condition that you will go—at once ; and think no more of me, except as a friend who is sorry for you—so sorry——”

Her grief made her none the less inexorable. Lloyd must go at once, and never attempt to see her again. She even wrung from him a half-promise that he would return to America immediately.

But this half-promise he did not fulfil. While Beatrice was to be seen on the boards of the Palladium, he could not deny himself the torturing pleasure of watching her, unsuspected, from a distance ; and every evening found him in his secluded corner, his feverish blue eyes fixed on the mock doorway through which the Princess would presently make her entrance. The attendants at the theatre began to exchange surmises as to the identity of the stalwart, bronzed young man, who never missed a performance of the new play, yet never went behind the scenes or seemed to possess an acquaintance among the audience.

The very last night of the Palladium season came at length. It was a great night in Richard Hale's life. Men distinguished in a hundred ways—politically, socially, in the world of science and of art—assembled to do him honour. The woman he loved, and whose genius, so to speak, had taken fire at his own, shared his hour of success ; before those doors were again thrown open, she would have become his wife. “ Polykrates at last ! ” he said to himself, conscious of an unreasoning terror of his own unexampled good fortune. “ I am too lucky.”

The performance went smoothly on. The great third act was just reaching its climax amidst the growing enthusiasm of the audience, when one of the subordinate actresses suddenly hesitated, paused, and broke down in her speech with a sharp cry of alarm. Hale looked hastily round, and saw two or three jets of flame issuing from one of the wings.

He laid his hand on Miss Heriot's, with a peremptory “ Stay where you are ! ” and then, almost before the terrible cry of “ Fire ! ” could be raised, he was at the footlights, arguing, expostulating, entreating, commanding : “ The fire was on the stage, and would be instantly isolated by the descent of the fireproof

curtain." His calm face, his firm tones did their work. There was no panic. The spectators began to go out in a perfectly orderly and collected manner.

As the great iron sheet fell between the audience and the flames Mr. Hale turned back to Beatrice. "Go now," he said, briefly and authoritatively. "Go straight out by the little stage door, and across to Wilson's the bookseller's. There will be no crowd on that side."

"And you, Richard?"

"I stay here, of course."

"Let me stay with you." She would have clung to his arm, but he put her gently from him.

"No, you would only be in my way. There is no great danger—I will come to you as soon as I can. Now go, my child." And Beatrice went, not daring to disobey.

It was long before Hale could leave his post. When the helpless and the panic-stricken among his associates had been got safely out of the way, it was found that the fire had taken fast hold of the elaborate scenery: and it needed most strenuous efforts on the part both of the firemen and their amateur assistants to prevent its seizing on the theatre itself. At last, however, owing chiefly to the manager's admirable coolness and resolute generalship, it was happily got under, with no result more serious than the destruction of a good many valuable theatrical "properties;" and Hale, throwing an outer coat over his smoke-blackened clothes, and muttering, "Thank God, it was no worse!" crossed the narrow street to Wilson's.

The caretaker's wife, a servant of his own in bygone days, stood on the doorstep watching for him. "Mr. Hale! I *am* glad to see you, sir! You're not hurt?"

"Not a bit of it," he returned cheerily. "Very grimy, as you see—that's all. How's Miss Heriot?"

"Better, sir, now."

"Better!" Hale ejaculated. "What has been wrong with her?"

"Didn't you know, sir? She *would* go back to look for you—spite of all me and John could say—since you were so long coming; and the smoke made her feel a bit faint and stifled. She's come round now, though; she'll be none the worse. The gentleman that carried her over was terribly frightened when he

brought her in, but I said, 'Law, sir! 'tis nothing but a fainting fit——.'"

"Where is she?" Hale interrupted.

"Upstairs, sir; please step this way. Best let me go first with the light, Mr. Hale; it's mortal dark on our stairs. The gentleman's up there with Miss Heriot still—hark, you may hear 'em talking! An old friend, he said he was. There! the lamp's gone out again with that nasty draught from the street-door. Stop here a moment, sir, and I'll fetch a match."

The good dame bustled off in great haste, but as she stopped on her way down to close the obnoxious door, found that she had mislaid her match-box (thereby necessitating a prolonged search on the shelves of a crowded dresser in a kitchen wrapped in Cimmerian gloom), and was troubled with a rheumatic knee that obliged her invariably to mount stairs with extreme deliberation, several minutes elapsed before she could rejoin her *quondam* master, whom she had left stranded on a pitch-dark landing, unable to move in any direction. "I'm sure I beg your pardon, sir," she began to say breathlessly, and then broke off with the dismayed exclamation, "Law, Mr. Hale! how ill you do look! Whatever is the matter?"

The actor was leaning, ghastly pale, against the wall, exactly at the spot where the woman had left him, with his eyes fixed on a half-open door a few steps higher up. His strong features were quivering like those of a man in acute pain; his erect figure drooped helplessly together—he looked all at once like an old man. But he started and drew himself up when the familiar voice struck his ear. "Hush!" he said sternly, pointing to the door ajar.

"Are you sure," the woman asked, in a whisper this time, "that you didn't get some hurt over there, sir?"

Mr. Hale passed his hand over his forehead. "Over there, Elizabeth? No, it wasn't *there*. I—I've been startled, perhaps, that's all. Go on, and say I'm here. Don't frighten Miss Heriot."

"Talk of frightening her!" quoth Elizabeth bluntly. "If you show her that face, Mr. Richard——"

"But I shall not show it to her," returned Richard Hale, with a strange smile. "If I couldn't put on another face when I pleased, I shouldn't be much of an actor, Elizabeth."

CHAPTER III.

IT was not surprising that for a few days after the fire Mr. Hale should have less time than usual to devote to his *fiancée*. Of course, the scope of the disaster had to be fully ascertained; and there were orders to be given, repairs to be executed, and insurance business to be attended to, all of which naturally encroached much upon his leisure. If he had other affairs on hand—inquiries to make, facts to ascertain, certain plans for the future to tear up and map out anew—Beatrice knew nothing of these additional preoccupations. When she saw him for a few brief moments each day she discovered no change in him, except, perhaps, that there was even a thought more than usual of anxious consideration and exquisite tenderness in his manner towards herself.

But at length, about a week after the evening of the fire, he startled her with a question. He had just risen to go away, and she had risen too, and was standing before him. "Beatrice," he asked suddenly, laying his hand on her arm, "do you believe in my love for you?"

"Of course," she answered, in surprise.

"Then you must believe that I would gladly do anything to make you happy. Well, this being the case, why don't you give me the chance of making you happy?"

"I don't understand," she faltered.

"Let me put my meaning more plainly, then. There is something that I, and I only, can give you, and yet you will not ask me for it. My dear, my dear, why can't you trust me altogether?"

She trembled, but her eyes met his bravely. "I do trust you—altogether," she replied. "But I want nothing."

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure."

Mr. Hale sighed very faintly, and withdrew his hand. "I must go now," he began.

Quickly she clasped her hands on his shoulder, and leaned her face upon them. "Don't go, Richard! Please stay with me to-day. It is a fancy, I suppose, but I cannot bear you to go. For this once, Richard!"

Hale's lips quivered, but the touch of his hand on her hair

was firm as well as tender. "Beatrice, my child, you are making a great mistake. Yes," as she looked up startled, with flushed cheeks and wet eyes—"a great mistake, the greatest that a woman can make, perhaps; yet one that only a very noble woman would be in any danger of making. You have shown me what a good woman can be and do. God bless you for that, dear!"

"Richard!"

"Remember always," he went on, "that the first mistake was *I mine*. chose the wrong time. Child, child, how *could* you think I would let you suffer for my selfish impatience?"

"What does this mean?" Beatrice asked wildly. "I cannot understand you."

"No," he replied, soothing her gently, "you cannot understand me, I know. And I shall not explain myself to-day. But I will explain to-morrow; to-morrow you will understand everything. Till then"—he stooped and kissed her lightly on the forehead—"good-bye, Beatrice."

It was his last farewell to her. The promised explanation came indeed on the morrow, but not in words from his lips; he could not trust himself so far. A letter would make everything sufficiently clear—and Arthur Lloyd could carry it.

"Look here!" the younger man had exclaimed, starting up almost in horror as the missive was put into his hands. "This is too much, you know. I—I should think it would make her hate the sight of me."

"You can say I sent you," returned Hale laconically, moving to the door. There he paused, with his hand on the lock. "Do not let Beatrice"—his voice shook slightly on the name—"distress herself about this matter. Since the odd number had to fall to somebody, I am glad it fell to me. She knows my theory of life," he added, smiling faintly. "She will understand."

A Homburg Beauty.

A NOVEL.

By MRS. EDWARD KENNARD.

Author of "A CRACK COUNTY," "MATRON OR MAID," "KILLED IN THE OPEN," "THE MYSTERY OF A WOMAN'S HEART," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE "GROSSE FRANKFURTER" STEEPLECHASE.

THE great event of the day was now about to take place, and for the first time during the afternoon the populace woke up so far as to begin to take a mild interest in the proceedings. The water-jump appeared the point of attraction, and here some forty or fifty individuals gathered.

Sans Coins was the first to show on the course. He proved a fine, upstanding bay horse, of hunter rather than racing-like appearance, and the universal verdict of our compatriots was, that another week or ten days' preparation would have vastly improved his condition. These astute gentlemen took exception to his being on the big side, but could not deny that he was a very "awkward-looking customer." Sans Coins, indeed, was full of quality from his game, thoroughbred little ears, to his black, well-set-on tail. He had a strong, arched back, lean hocks, and long muscular thighs that looked as if they ought to carry him for ever. It was regarded as a great point in Sans Coins' favour, that Baron Roederer had been able to secure the services of so fortunate and renowned a jockey as Jerry O'Hagan, whose fame had spread even to the Continent. Certainly as far as appearances went, it seemed as if nothing could beat Sans Coins. Although there were seven entries, when the numbers were hoisted it was a great disappointment to all present to find that only three competitors were destined to take part in the race, namely—Sans Coins, who was served up a hotter favourite than ever, by the few Frankfort patrons of the Turf given to betting; Adare, who received light support from some personal friends of Von Oehlschlaeger; and Finasseur, an animal who entered into no

one's calculations, and whose name was scarcely mentioned. Certainly he was a very ordinary looking horse, with action so tied and "dotty," that the first glance was sufficient to prove, even to the most ignorant, how very little chance he had of holding his own against his two English-bred rivals. Jerry O'Hagan sat Sans Coins with an air of easy confidence, as he walked him quietly down the course, preparatory to a preliminary canter in front of the Grand Stand. To all his friends he had given the same advice: "My dear old fellow, if you can find any one fool enough to bet against Roederer's quad, lump on the stuff. It's a dead certainty." And the majority of his intimates, believing that for once they were being put on to a real good thing, forthwith adopted the suggestion. Consequently, many were the glances directed to the gallant bay as he came thundering past the stand, whilst a few noted with dissatisfaction that the favourite's action was high, and not precisely adapted to the ground over which he would have to travel. But then—what could beat him? That was always the consoling question to which no answer presented itself. Besides Jerry was not a fool. Quite the reverse, he knew how the land lay. It stood to reason he would never have come all this way to ride a particular horse, unless that horse's success were a moral certainty. Everybody was aware that the one aim of Jerry's life was to top the winning list of gentlemen riders.

On the present occasion he had good grounds for being sanguine, since the veriest tyro could distinguish that Sans Coins was the courtier of the party. Only a very small minority discovered that Adare, though far from handsome, possessed several excellent points, which, in a severe contest, might perhaps tell. He was a tall, well-bred and somewhat leggy grey, standing over sixteen hands in height, with the limbs of a greyhound, and a long, switchy tail which, never having been docked, well-nigh swept the ground, causing him to resemble an untamed steed of the desert. If the big barrel of Sans Coins met with criticism among the initiated, no such fault could possibly be found with Adare. He looked as much over-trained as the other did under; being so thin and lanky that he might easily have been taken for Don Quixote's pet steed, the celebrated and never-to-be-forgotten Rosinante. Nevertheless, what little flesh covered his great angular frame was singularly firm, his thin crest, too, appeared

hard as a board, whilst the muscles of his long, lean, second thighs stood out like ropes. An undeniably plain horse, who even shears and scissors could not have rendered anything else but ugly, yet with a wonderfully clear blue eye, and a spirited physiognomy. A horse, like some women, that ninety-nine men might pass as unworthy of their notice, and yet who, for the hundredth, would possess an attraction infinitely greater than mere beauty. In short, Adare looked what he was—a good, honest, queerly put-together nag, who might perhaps win if by any evil freak of Fortune Sans Coins fell or met with an accident. As for Finasseur, his preliminary canter raised a smile of contempt, so hopelessly wooden were his movements. He was of a totally different class from the other two, and appeared quite out of place on a race-course, even on a racecourse overgrown with thistles, nettles, weeds, heather and wild flowers. To almost every one present it was perfectly patent that the Grosser Frankfurter Steeplechase would necessarily be reduced to a match between the English-bred pair.

The jockeys of Sans Coins and Finasseur were attired in the customary silken jackets and caps to which the age is familiarized wherever the sport of horse-racing has been introduced; but the rider of Adare was in full uniform. Karl appeared in his dark-green military frock coat, with its gilt buttons and red facings. He wore high epaulettes, a pair of white, pipe-clayed gloves, tight cloth breeches, and an immense pair of regulation boots, finished off by punishing spurs. Thus arrayed, he probably presented a common enough spectacle to his fellow-countrymen, but a very singular one to ours, who were not accustomed to seeing officers racing in full regimentals. So striking and unusual an apparition, suggestive rather of military glory than of prowess between the flags, took them by surprise.

"Well!" exclaimed Sir North, scrambling up to the box-seat. "Our friend Von Kessler looks queer enough in all conscience. I don't mind betting two to one that he tumbles off at the first fence. Did you ever see such a scarecrow too as Adare? The wretched beast is nothing but a bag of skin and bones. My money is safe, at any rate."

"You shouldn't crow too soon, Sir North," said Hetty, with an attempt at playfulness, but inwardly feeling rather incensed at remarks which she considered unwarrantably disparaging. "The

old story of the hare and the tortoise may perhaps repeat itself."

Sir North did not reply to this observation, for his attention was engrossed by the horses, who, with the exception of Sans Coins, came cantering past the stand. Somewhat to the surprise of our friends on the coach, it now became apparent that the grey possessed uncommonly good action. His long, smooth stride made him glide over the ground in a marvellously deceptive manner. Finasseur was fully extended, whilst Adare lobbed along quite easily and comfortably, somewhat after the fashion of a kangaroo, the immense propelling power of his flat hocks lending him a peculiarly springy gait.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the baronet, taking a second look at Adare through his field-glasses. "That old grey screw slips along. He gets over the ground in good style."

"Yes, but he'll soon shut up," said North, reassuringly; "such a tail and such a mane will act as regular stoppers. They're like full-spread sails set against a gale, and as for poor Von Kessler, it's even betting he won't get round the course."

These remarks and others of a similar nature, rendered Hetty exceedingly nervous. It quite made her blood boil, to hear in what poor estimation Karl's horsemanship, and for the matter of that, Karl himself, was held.

"I never bet," she said to Sir North, "but really on this occasion I am almost tempted to lay against Sans Coins, if only to show that my sympathies are with the weaker side. Poor Adare and his rider have come in for nothing but abuse."

North Penywern looked at her with a smile of peculiarly penetrating intelligence.

"We all know where your sympathies are, without being told," he said roguishly.

She flushed up, till her cheeks flamed rosy-red. Her lips quivered—nevertheless she managed to say with a semblance of indifference:

"I haven't the very faintest notion what you mean."

"Would you like me to offer an explanation?" he inquired in a bantering tone.

"No, certainly not," she rejoined, so quickly as to betray a certain amount of alarm. "I would like nothing of the sort."

He laughed.

"Ah! I thought so. You're not half patriotic, Miss Davidson, and I verily believe you think Germany and the Germans far beyond your own countrymen. That's not as it should be."

"I suppose you'll admit," she said saucily, "that Englishmen are not *quite* perfect; and, superior as they may be, are nevertheless open to a *little* improvement."

"I think them ahead of these puffy, beer-drinking chaps, Miss Hetty, if you mean that."

"Well! and I think the beer-drinking chaps, as you call them, infinitely nicer than our nobody-but-self young gentlemen, Mr. North, if that is what you intend to impress upon my mind."

She was sharp enough to feel that he was attempting to get what is commonly called "a rise" out of her, and greatly resented the process. Why would not everybody leave her alone, instead of teasing her about Karl, just as if they were already an engaged couple?

"You look cross, Miss Davidson," said North in his most tantalizing manner.

"I *am* cross, Mr. Penywern. For once, my looks are a correct index to my feelings."

"Who has had the misfortune to incur your resentment?" he asked jestingly.

"An intimate friend of yours. One Mr. Penywern by name."

"Indeed!" he exclaimed, simulating profound surprise. "What have I done?"

"You have rudely found fault with my taste, and accused me of having no sympathy with my countrymen."

"Ha, ha! I begin to understand at last. Lord! I never thought you would take the matter up so seriously. Then you do *really* prefer penniless German officers to rich English lords? Nobody need talk about modern young ladies being mercenary after that."

"It would be very much better if people would have the tact and the taste to leave modern young ladies alone," rejoined Hetty irritably, for it seemed as if everybody had combined on this particular day to tease and worry her about Karl.

"Perhaps so, but the question is, would they not fare considerably worse if left entirely to their own devices?"

"Mr. Penywern," said Hetty fiercely, "it is very good of you to lecture me, very good indeed, but your trouble is wasted."

"I am sorry to hear that," he said gravely. "Sorry on Charlie's account."

"What has he got to do with it, pray?"

"Miss Davidson," he said seriously, "you can't pretend to be so ignorant, as not to know. If things are as I fear, you are more conspicuous for your unworldliness than for your common sense."

She stretched herself to her full height. She had a difficulty in controlling her anger. Such impertinence as this was not to be tolerated.

"I think," she retorted, with what was meant for bitter sarcasm, "that the world will not be very badly off for common sense so long as such calculating young gentlemen as Mr. North Penywern continue to reside in it. He, and ones like him, can take care of themselves, even if other people can't."

"Thank you, Miss Davidson, for your good opinion. I feel very much flattered by it," he rejoined, flushing hotly.

"I conclude," she went on, in tones of withering irony, "that holding such views as you do, you will never marry. You'll have such a difficulty in finding a wife *sensible* enough for you."

To be quizzed by a pretty woman is what few men can stand with equanimity. There is something in a finely shaped head, an exquisite complexion, and two great, deep eyes, shaded by soft, curly lashes singularly trying to male serenity. To see these attractions is to admire, and to admire means a curious derangement of the cerebral atoms. North Penywern looked at Hetty, with a look rendered unusually tender by heat, sentiment and champagne.

"I don't know about a wife sensible enough," he said, taking up his seat by her side, and sprawling his arm familiarly along the back rail of the coach, until it appeared suspiciously near to the waist of his fair companion, "but I do happen to know at this moment, where there is a girl quite pretty enough for any chap to lose his heart to."

"North, North, give me a hand up, there's a good fellow," called out Amelia from down below. He started and withdrew his arm.

"Oh! by all means. With the greatest pleasure. Put your foot on the axle of the wheel—there, that's right—and now on the tyre. Bravo! You're as active as a cat," he said somewhat guiltily, as Amelia plumped down beside him all rosy and beam-

ing. But that treacherous North, after making an odiously commonplace remark, resumed his conversation with Hetty. To do Amelia justice, she had not the bump of jealousy as largely developed as most of her sex. But she was really fond of North, and he had certainly given her reason to suppose that he reciprocated the sentiment. And now, when she saw him gazing at Hetty with dark, speaking eyes, that betrayed admiration, if not something more, a little, sharp pang ran right through her heart. If Hetty had not been her friend, she could almost have hated her.

"What are you talking about?" she inquired, with a clumsy effort at playfulness.

"Nothing very particular," answered North readily. "Miss Davidson and I can't quite agree as to the peculiar fascinations of Herr Von Kessler. She entertains a higher opinion of them than I, and so we have been arguing on the subject."

"Oh, is that all?" said Amelia, with a sigh of relief. "Karl is a good fellow in his way, but of course he is not like an Englishman. One could not expect it."

"Why Milly!" cried Hetty. "You are every bit as bad as Mr. Penywern. I maintain that Englishmen are spoilt by their selfishness, luxury, and conceit, and that in these respects a poor German officer like Herr Von Kessler is infinitely ahead of them. I spoke generally, and Mr. North seemed to take a curious delight in putting a different interpretation on my words. He insists upon construing them personally, which I deem most unfair."

"Oh! you are quarrelling, are you?" exclaimed Amelia, with a brilliant smile. "How very wrong. Where are the horses?"

"Nearly opposite to us, on their way to the starting-point. They will be there in another minute. By George! if the grey were only trimmed, and relieved of all that superfluous hair, he'd be quite a slashing-looking beast. There's something about the beggar that takes my fancy," said North.

"It's all genuine admiration too," put in Hetty slyly, "for, unlike Sans Coins, we know that the rider has nothing to do with this eulogy——"

"Hetty," interrupted Amelia bluntly. "You are a goose. Have not I already warned you against the captivating Karl? With all his perfections, his martial air, his blue eyes and caressing manners, you have been repeatedly told that he is the last man calculated to make a good husband. He is a big animal, with

an inordinate capacity for eating and drinking—more particularly the former—an imperfectly developed brain, and a quite wonderful eye for a rich or pretty girl. If rich and pretty combined so much the better. His eye becomes the sharper."

"True as gospel, every word. You've hit him to the life, Milly," said North approvingly. "Ha! ha!" he chuckled to himself. "She sees through the infernal rascal fast enough. She's not to be caught by his fair speeches, like that poor little Davidson girl. After all, Milly's the wife for me. I should soon get tired of the other. There's nothing in her—nothing whatever, only she's so uncommonly pretty that a man can't help making a donkey of himself if he even catches sight of her face. Some chaps don't object to a fool, but I do. According to my way of thinking, brains always come to the front in the long run. They must crush beauty eventually, but," diverting his attention to Miss Dawkins, "their combination is excessively agreeable, for if one goes you have always the other to fall back upon. When a man marries, he makes a confoundedly risky investment, and he can't be too careful. So North, my boy, don't commit yourself. Ride a waiting race. My idea of a wife," he soliloquized thoughtfully, "is a person capable of filling the position of brain-sharpener. I hate your dull, dolly women, who, when the first excitement of matrimony has worn off, sink down into mere nonentities of the unpaid housekeeper order. Willing to give cheerful and active services in return for a good home, etc., etc. Oh! yes, I know the sort of thing. Keep your emotions well in hand, my friend."

"A penny for your thoughts," said Amelia mischievously. "From the expression of your face, they must be monstrously wise."

"By Jove! exclaimed North, unheeding the observation, "They're off. Yes, they're off. Sans Coins' got at least a three-length start of the other two. Lucky it's not a 1,000 metres race."

The horses had indeed started, and at first took it very leisurely; Sans Coins dictating the pace, Adare lying close up, and pulling hard, and Finasseur finding a difficulty in maintaining the place he already occupied, namely, that of an indifferent third.

As they neared the stand they increased their speed, and the

rider of Adare, going close to the spot occupied by Sir North's coach, looked at its occupants, and when his eye met that of a fair girl in blue, he held out a faded rose in his right hand, and, before replacing it, pressed it to his heart. Hetty blushed vividly. She felt as if everybody must guess her secret. Karl's face was set and rigid, and many shades whiter than usual. A cold light glittered in his eye. She had only just time to note these things, and then he was gone, Adare's grey heels throwing up a cloud of dust as he rounded the bend, hugging the rails with close audacity.

"Where did the gallant Karl get that faded but precious posy from, I wonder!" whispered North slyly in Hetty's ear.

The interrogation confused her to such an extent that she found it impossible to make any reply, and consequently squeezed her blushing face against her opera-glasses in silence.

The competitors were approaching the first jump—a set of hurdles, thinly topped with gorse; after which came the most extraordinary apology for a British bullfinch ever seen. It consisted of a low, sandy bank, irregularly ornamented by a series of unequal sized twigs. Naturally, the weakest places were those selected. Sans Coins was pulling double. Jerry O'Hagan had evidently his work cut out to hold him. His strong hands held the reins well down on either side of the horse's moving shoulders, but every now and then, he was forced to lean back and pull—pull till Sans Coins' head almost came into collision with the toe of his rider's boot. Adare lay on the right, about half a length behind him, whilst Finasseur appeared to be increasing rather than making up the distance lost at starting. Every Englishman present was consumed with curiosity to see how the German officer would conduct himself at the first fence. The odds were just about even that he would cut a voluntary. It therefore astonished them a good deal to find Adare, when within a few yards of the hurdles, prick his ears and make such a quick, determined rush at them, that it actually landed him ahead of Sans Coins, who, although he jumped in faultless style, was undoubtedly a slow fencer. Neither had Adare's rider tumbled off, as so confidently predicted by the many. In fact, he rode the horse admirably, gave him his head just at the right moment, and sat as steadily as a rock. The English faction were simply dumb-founded.

"Dash my wig!" exclaimed North Penywern, who, owing to

the necessity he had been under of assuaging his thirst at unaccustomed times, was brilliantly conversational. "That fellow Von Kessler can ride, and knows a trick or two into the bargain. Did you see the style in which he sat those hurdles? If the grey continues to jump in that form, he will gain several strides at every fence."

North's prediction proved correct. Adare's nimbleness was quite extraordinary, and at every leap he won ground. He seemed to do by spring what Sans Coins did by effort. After each jump, Herr Von Kessler invariably pulled the grey back, thus forcing Sans Coins to make the running.

These tactics proved somewhat disconcerting to our friend Jerry, whose object was to pump his opponents at starting, and then canter leisurely in, instead of being obliged to ride a punishing finish on a horse, who, his quick eye had easily detected, was a little short of condition. He had trusted to Sans Coins' superior speed settling his rivals in the first two miles. Finasseur was all right. He answered perfectly to these calculations, but this grey thing seemed likely to give trouble—at any rate more than he had anticipated. In short, Jerry committed the very common British fault of under-rating his adversary, and now as they galloped along, side by side almost, but with Adare always about a quarter of a length behind, a horrid suspicion began to dawn upon him that Adare's jockey knew just as well as he did himself how to ride a waiting race, and, moreover, was one not easily to be diverted from his purpose.

Having completed the entire circuit, they were now about to cross that part of the course in which the *Barrière*, Irish bank and water jump were situated. The Grand Stand was almost opposite, and conscious that all eyes were upon them, Jerry increased the pace materially, hoping to shake off Adare. Finasseur scarcely disturbed his thoughts—he was toiling along, a good ten lengths in the rear—but gallop as the leader would, that lean, grey steed of the flowing mane and lengthy tail stuck to his quarters. As they approached the bank, having cleared the *barrière* successfully, they were almost abreast. Adare shot out like an arrow from the bow, and his rider, aware of his eager disposition, made no attempt to check him, but just allowed him to take it as he liked. Adare was Irish born, and knew more than his German cavalier, who had the sense to leave him to his own

devices. With a pause so slight as to be almost imperceptible, he bucked like a fawn on to the loose, sandy structure, and kicking back with his hind heels, landed at least four lengths in advance of Sans Coins. The latter, good, game horse as he was, though distrusting the nature of the queer-looking mound before him, made no attempt to refuse it. But he committed an error of judgment, as we all of us do at times. Not attempting to jump, he ran quickly up the bank and then tried to glide cautiously down on his hind legs. But the loose sand gave way and his toes slithered straight into the ditch. He only just saved a fall, and left Adare with a considerable lead, while Finasseur was enabled to lessen the gap that separated him from the favourite. O'Hagan, however, quickly set Sans Coins going again, and the horse, whose bolt was yet far from shot, soon began to recover ground. Meantime, Von Kessler rode with great nerve and judgment, for alive to the generous nature of the animal he bestrode, he drove him at the water-jump without waiting for Sans Coins to keep the grey company. He chose an easy spot and Adare flew over the ditch with sublime indifference to its dimensions, jumping nearer five-and-twenty than ten feet. Sans Coins followed suit. He was one of those free and resolute horses not given to refusing, and was soon once more on level terms with Adare. Jerry, however, had been obliged to send him along pretty hard in order to regain his position. The pair galloped on, leaving the Stand to their left. They then jumped an insignificant wall and disappeared into the country, running the long, narrow loop as shown on the map. So great had been the interest evoked by the leaders that people had almost forgotten Finasseur. It therefore came quite as a surprise when the poor, outpaced beast was seen to get over the "Irischer Wall" in an extraordinary, but quite indescribable manner. Every glass was centred on him as with heavy, lurching gait he made for the water-jump. His neck was outstretched, from his extended nostrils issued two slender columns of vapour, and his tail, held high, quivered in the most distressing manner. But his heart was big—bigger apparently than that of his jockey, who seemed undecided whether to pull up before all the occupants of the stand, or by making one bold effort, reach a point of refuge where he might slink away unperceived. His indecision did not help his steed, who, what between weariness, shortness of breath and inferior quality, had

not much steam left in him, and jumping short, landed with fore legs only on *terra firma*. For a moment he seemed to rear upward, and then fell back into the water, just giving his rider time to fling himself on to the bank. Finasseur lay like a log, too exhausted to make an effort, but he was quickly dragged from the ditch and set on his legs again, having received no harm beyond a partial wetting. He was hardly out of the way, before Sans Coins and Adare once more became visible. The former led, but apparently on sufferance only, for the grey was going strong and well close at his girths. They cleared the wall abreast, and then all eyes were levelled at them as they went at the water. The sun was shining right into the depths of the moist ditch, but neither minded that. They took the water-jump—such as it was—in gallant style. One felt instinctively that the contest was becoming keener, closer, more exciting. Sans Coins' mishap at the bank had been of service to him. This time he doubled it as cleverly as Adare himself, though rather more deliberately. He lacked the grey's agility and stag-like movements, and had to exert force where the other used spring; nevertheless, he continued to fence in perfect style.

When they had crossed the field they ran round its right half, and so passed the Stand again; Jerry's face wore a determined, in place of its former confident expression. He could feel his horse's heart beating under him, and he knew that Sans Coins was beginning to tire. Perhaps similar fears were stealing over Karl, for he was ghastly pale, and his lips gleamed blue beneath the dark ends of his fair moustache. He attempted to smile as he passed Sir North's coach, but his smile had lost its former sunniness.

Again, that long and tedious round, with hurdles, bullfinch, barrière and open ditch. Jumps that were ridiculously small on fresh horses, seemed quite big enough when labouring along on nags getting to the end of their tether. The superiority of the grey's fencing now stood him in good stead, and several times it enabled Von Kessler to husband his speed. The heavy sand impeded their weary footsteps, the hot sun streamed slantingly down upon their foaming sides. Poor gallant horses! So generous, and yet so tired! Are not ye an example to the human species, many of whom give in long before they are really beaten? "Pluck" is just about the grandest quality that either brute or man can

possess, and both these horses had it. They were as determined as their masters to fight the struggle to the end, and would drop rather than flinch. Gallantly, but wearily, they ploughed on through the springless sand. Their shapely heads were lowered, and their upraised tails bobbed up and down with little quivering jerks that sadly told a story of distress.

Slowly but surely, Sans Coins' want of condition began to tell, and although a superiorly made horse to Adare, the latter got his nose in front and looked like keeping it there. Only one last flight of hurdles barred their entrance to the Straight. Sans Coins blundered badly at them, whilst Adare, not rising sufficiently, hit the top bar hard with both fore legs. Fortunately, neither he nor his rider lost their equilibrium, and although he pecked a bit on landing, he was first on to the Race Course.

Jerry recovered Sans Coins immediately in a truly artistic manner, and as soon as he had got his horse fairly on his legs again, called upon him in a resolute and vigorous fashion. It was his last chance. This he felt instinctively, for things had come to such a pass, that only superior jockeyship could snatch the race out of the fire. Ah! Sans Coins, good game horse as thou art, what a pity thy trainer had not seen fit to give thee ten days' more preparation. They would have made all the difference. A desperate struggle ensued. Jerry used both spur and whip unsparingly. He stood unrivalled amongst gentlemen jockeys in their use. By a supreme effort, of which no animal containing a particle of cowardice in his composition could have been capable, inch by inch Sans Coins crept up, until his tan muzzle was almost abreast of Adare's girths. Crack, whirl crack, whirl, went the whip, and for one short, exciting moment it looked as if the bay would win. At this critical juncture Karl did not lose his head. Instead of trying to imitate Mr. O'Hagan's punishing movements, he had the sense to sit perfectly still, and to this fact he owed his ultimate success. The grey had always a little the best of the struggle, and gradually wearing down his opponent, managed after a most tremendous finish to secure the judge's verdict by a neck. Riders and horses had done their best, and the latter did not require much pulling up, but oh! how black Jerry looked as he turned his panting steed towards the paddock, and the thought of the losses incurred by that day's ride kept accumulating in his mind. He had been fairly beaten. He was too much of a gentle-

man not to acknowledge the fact, but that did not render it one whit the less unpleasant. Why the deuce had that fool, Roederer, made so sure of winning? He should not have got into half such a mess, had it not been for his confounded confidence. A fellow looked such an idiot, coming all the way from Ireland on purpose to win a race, and going back without anything to show for it but an overdrawn balance at his bankers. Poor Jerry! He certainly was not in a good humour. If only he could bring a plea of foul riding against Von Kessler, but that was out of the question. Meanwhile, Hetty felt as if she could hardly contain her delight. Karl! Karl! Oh! what a hero he was. How he had proved to all these contemptuous Englishmen that he was made of quite as good stuff as themselves. By his success, her preference was justified. Bars of purple cloud began to steal athwart the horizon, opening out their fleecy edges for the golden sun to sink amongst them. The shadows were creeping on, rendering still more vivid those portions of the Course still steeped in sunshine. It was photographed upon her brain. The Stand, the fences, the final struggle, and the sight of that noble form sitting so still and majestic on the good, grey horse. The truest, purest melody ever sang by human being, sang in her simple heart, for Love, unselfish and uncalculating, reigned there supreme. What a divine folly it is!

CHAPTER XXVI.

A HUNGRY HERO.

SURROUNDED by friends, and with Adare's trainer and owner walking proudly alongside of the horse, Karl Von Kessler rode past the Stand towards the Paddock at a walk. His right hand rested on his thigh, his body was bent forward, as if from thorough exhaustion, and his face, though lit up by a triumphant smile, was as white as a sheet. Great drops of perspiration stood on his brow, and the appearance both of rider and horse showed how severe had been the finish. Adare's lean grey head was held low and outstretched, his flanks still heaved convulsively, and the crimson linings of his wide-distended nostrils were plainly to be seen.

The English, whatever their faults, are a generous race. Although every man on Sir North's coach, except Lord Charles,

had backed O'Hagan, there was not one who at sight of the victor did not salute him with a hearty British cheer. Little as they liked losing their money, they could not refrain from paying this tribute to good horsemanship. Hetty, carried away by the example of her companions, clapped her tiny hands until such a rent was inflicted on the right glove that her pink palm showed itself quite obtrusively. Karl moved towards the railings. For one instant his eye sought Hetty's. A triumphant gleam seemed to radiate from it and flash into her own. Then he took off his cap and made all those on the coach a sweeping bow.

To Hetty's intense annoyance she felt herself blushing violently, but fortunately every one's attention was fixed upon the winner, so that her rosy cheeks escaped observation.

"Are you coming back to Frankfort with us?" shouted Sir North. "If so we'll wait for you." He was a gallant old man, and knew how to bear his reverses without turning a hair. The unkind said he had had so many that he had long since grown accustomed to them.

"No," called back Karl in reply. "Herr Von Oehlschlaeger has promised to drive me in his phaeton; but I'll be sure to join you at the Café Casino in time for dinner." So saying he moved slowly on in the direction of the paddock.

Hetty could not help feeling a slight thrill of disappointment shoot through her frame. She had only seen him for a few minutes all day long, and she wanted to see him so badly. The hours were stealing away, and there would not be much more time left. Then she scolded herself for being selfish and unreasonable. She was not the only person who wished to congratulate him on his success. Every one of his acquaintances probably desired to offer their felicitations. No, she must exercise patience, and not allow her love to render her exacting. It ought to be quite enough for her that he had won the race and publicly proved his superiority, for, foolish child, she refused to see that the horse had anything to do with it. North Penywern and Lord Charles Mountgard could not run him down after this. That was one comfort. Thus reasoning, Hetty partially regained her spirits, consoling herself with the thought that at any rate Karl was coming to dinner, and perhaps she might have the good luck to sit next him; or better still be his companion on the homeward drive, when the glaring daylight had faded and given place

to the restful repose of night. They could talk then—ah, how beautifully! and even if he didn't care to converse, it wouldn't much matter so long as she was near him. His mere presence sufficed to content her. She asked for nothing more. Karl, only Karl, was the cry of her heart.

"Damn that German chap," growled Sir North, *sotto voce*, as he climbed on to the box-seat and took possession of the reins. "Who ever would have thought that he could ride?" Then he suppressed a sigh and murmured despondently: "Where the devil I'm to get a monkey from heaven only knows. Good thing Lady P. didn't come to the races to-day, or I should never have heard the last of it. Even the best of women can't refrain from nagging a fellow when he's down in his luck. However, it's no use crying over spilt milk." With which heroic conclusion the baronet buttoned up his coat and gently applied the whip to the four broad backs beneath him. Plunge, rear, plunge went the horses as the grooms in attendance let go their heads, and then they were off, trotting so smartly and truly from the course as to evoke the admiration of all beholders.

Very pleasant was the drive back to Frankfort along the straight white road, and in the now rapidly cooling air. Yet, with the exception of Lord Charles, who prided himself on never betting, the spirits of the gentlemen seemed decidedly damped. The ladies were tired, in spite of their assertions to the contrary, and a certain quietude, produced partly by fatigue, partly by depression, settled upon all the party. A good dinner and plenty of wine were necessary to dispel it, if indeed they could succeed in lightening the financial clouds raised by Herr Von Kessler's unexpected victory.

Lord Charles, who sat next Hetty, tried his very best to improve the occasion, but she was strangely absent, whilst the rapt expression of her pretty face afforded him subject for intense curiosity. What, or rather *who* could she be thinking about? He would have given a quarter's income to find out.

"Are you tired?" he asked, trying to get at his object in an indirect way.

"No, not particularly. Are you?"

"Me! What an idea! Of course I am not."

A prolonged pause followed, which he broke by saying, in tones not free from pique: "Don't you want to talk?"

"I don't mind. It makes no difference," she answered apathetically.

"Not to you, perhaps, but it does to me. Why are you so quiet all of a sudden?"

"Is it necessary for me to keep up a perpetual chatter when in your company, Lord Charles?"

He flushed scarlet with annoyance.

"You mean that I monopolise the conversation, Miss Davidson?"

"If you do I am truly grateful."

After this direct snub his lordship subsided into total silence, whilst a horrible suspicion, implanted by North Penywern, recurred to his mind. Was she really stupid? Not mildly and inoffensively stupid like so many of her sex, but deadly, overpoweringly dull? He glanced at her surreptitiously. No, he could not believe it. Her education might have been defective, but there was no want of intelligence visible in that exquisitely-tinted countenance. Nevertheless, he gave up further attempts for the present of making himself agreeable. She was not in a sentimental or responsive mood. The heat, no doubt, had knocked her up, though she would not own to the fact. Many natives of Frankfort turned out to watch the carriages returning from the races, and the coach came in for more than its fair share of honours. The bridge was thronged with people, who gazed admiringly after Sir North's well-appointed team as they bowled along. Arrived at the Café Casino, an effusive reception was accorded to them by the head waiter and his satellites, who whisked to and fro with pale, damp faces, and white napkins that did duty both as handkerchiefs and dusters. Their table was then pointed out, and being near an open window, gained every one's approval. As it still wanted twenty minutes to the hour fixed for dinner, the gentlemen took a stroll down the principal street, whilst the ladies were left to their own devices. A few minutes later on they were quietly seated, when, all of a sudden, Hetty's heart gave a tremendous bound, and then seemed to stand still altogether. A gentleman had entered the room.

No need to tell her who it was. She knew without looking—literally *feeling* his presence. Karl, for it was he, quickly advanced towards the table reserved for Sir North Penywern and his guests.

"Good evening, ladies," he said, and the mere sound of his voice made her thrill. "I hope I have not kept you waiting long. As soon as we had seen to the horse I left the race-course immediately."

"On the contrary," said Mrs. Northcote pleasantly, "we hardly ventured to hope for your arrival so soon, and consequently our male belongings are taking a stroll round the town."

"Ach! that is good. Then I may sit down beside you. Here, Heinrich," addressing the German waiter in his native tongue, as he deposited a plated basket containing crescent rolls upon the table. "Bring me the *menu du jour*. Perhaps we shall be able to make some little additions."

Heinrich did as desired, whereupon Karl proceeded to study the bill of fare with an intense and undisguised interest. Hetty gazed rapturously at her hungry hero. His slightest action appeared full of nobility.

"Ja," he said approvingly to Heinrich. "It is a very good dinner—a very good dinner indeed; but I would ask you, my friend, to introduce the *pommes de terre sautées*, which you gave me the last time I dined here. They were," turning to the ladies, and applying the tips of his fingers to his lips, "something too perfect—so light, so finely salted, so admirably cooked. Ach! you agree with me. You like *pommes de terre sautées*? That is well. And, Heinrich,"—as that worthy prepared to beat a retreat.

"Ja, mein Herr." (Yes, sir.)

"There was an ice, if you remember—an ice composed of the juice of the grape, of vanilla, and pine-apple. That, too, would be desirable to set before Sir North. There is more distinction about it than about a mere *glace Napolitaine*. The one shows refinement, delicacy, originality; the other—pah! the other is ordinary, and does nothing to enhance the fame of the Café Casino. Can you not say one little word to Herr Klopfsmann?"

Heinrich bowed his consent, and trotted off at extra speed, to convey to the artistic Klopfsmann the sentiments of Herr Von Kessler. The *chef* was anxious to please the hero of the day, through whose recommendations many English people visited the Café, and therefore at once signified his willingness to make the required improvements.

"There is just time," he said. "Just time to freeze the ice, but

no more. To be really good it should stand for an hour in the refrigerator."

Having attended to the matter of greatest importance—namely, dinner—Karl gave a sigh of pleasurable anticipation, and addressed himself to Hetty. To "bant" for a whole fortnight had been no joke. Thank goodness! that part of the business was over. He could not have stood it much longer. He had a wolf-like hunger upon him, and to-night was prepared to make up for back-spans.

"I can't tell you how proud I am that you have not worn my colours in vain," he said in a soft voice to the girl.

"I have been longing to offer my congratulations on your victory," she rejoined with emotion. "How magnificently you rode. Poor little O'Hagan! I could not help pitying him, for any one might have seen from the first that he had not a chance against you." And she turned her star-like eyes upon him, making the blood quicken in his veins.

Karl gave a superior smile. She was a dear little thing in her way, but as guileless as a child in arms. He quite realised that her praise went considerably beyond the mark. It was very agreeable, however, and he saw no reason why he should damp her enthusiasm. If she chose to exalt him into a demi-god, when he possessed merely earthly attributes, no blame could attach to him.

"O'Hagan is awfully savage, so I hear," he said, with every appearance of the liveliest satisfaction. "You see he made so sure of winning. It seems he told a friend of mine that he would have given anything to bring a charge of foul riding against me. But he couldn't; I took good care of that." And Karl swelled out his broad chest, and looked exceedingly imposing.

Hetty thought him simply magnificent, in this sternly virtuous mood. The only difficulty she experienced was in concealing her thoughts. It is probable, however, that he made a pretty shrewd guess at them. At any rate, the incense which she offered up so freely inflamed his vanity not a little. Her auburn hair, her delicate contour and peach-like bloom were hard to resist, especially when behind them he saw, in his mind's eye, an enormous fortune. Karl had made various experiments among the fair sex. But then, they had always been experiments, and this was a certainty. Ah! what horses he would buy in the good

time coming. How he would live on the fat of the land, instead of being forced to count up every miserable mark. There was nothing to wait for. He wished he were married already, and if the poor old man missed his daughter very much, he was quite prepared to show him what a kind, what an excellent and desirable son-in-law it had been his good fortune to obtain. Moreover, if his father-in-law lived in a decent hunting country, he would have no objection, none whatever, to spending the winter with him. It was only fitting and right that he should become acquainted with every detail appertaining to the vast estate that would one day be his, and his children's. These and similar thoughts made him feel very tenderly inclined towards Hetty.

"*Liebchen*" (dearest), he whispered in her ear, "I must not appear to devote myself to you too exclusively. It will excite remark, and Miss Dawkins, she has eyes—eyes, ach! as sharp as Mr. Penywern's. Therefore, if at dinner time I seem to take notice only of what is on my plate, you will know the reason. These Englishmen they are not kind. They say pleasant things to my face, but in their heart of hearts they do not like me. Is it not so?"

"I am sure I don't know," answered Hetty, overcome with confusion, for he had hit the right nail on the head.

"Ach! never mind," he said magnanimously. "It is the way of the world; and as long as you are good to me, nothing else matters. Will you promise to sit beside me this evening, as we drive home on the coach?"

"Yes," she answered, trembling with delight. "If you wish it."

"I *do* wish it. Little sceptic, to pretend to doubt my word." So saying Karl turned to Mrs. Northcote, and answered some question which she had put three times to him concerning Adare.

The gentlemen now appeared, and shortly afterwards dinner was served. The guests were not wholly congruous, and the presence of the big German officer introduced a foreign element, which did not tend to revive the Englishmen's spirits. Indeed, much sparkling Moselle had to be freely circulated before tongues began to wag. Karl behaved with unexpected modesty. Instead of bragging and boasting about the race, he applied himself exclusively to his dinner, and displayed little or no animation, except when a dish seemed likely to disappear without his obtain-

ing a second helping—then he woke up, but subsided again into a state of quietude when he had got what he wanted. In fact, he kept his jaws so steadily at work that it was a downright impossibility for him to converse at any length. To see a man take such a large, solid, and substantial pleasure in his dinner was really quite refreshing. He never passed a single dish, but waded through all with apparently the same satisfaction. Once only he spoke to Hetty, who sat opposite, and that was to say with a significant smile:

"Pommes de terre sautées. Have some. I recommend them. They are most excellent."

Hetty sat and admired his appetite, as she did everything else about him, and was quite angry with Amelia for whispering some mischievous remark anent Jack and his bag into North Penywern's ear. Thus the meal passed off. Outwardly every one maintained a show of gaiety, but inwardly, all those at table were conscious that their merriment was forced. To use a slang expression, the Englishmen did not "tumble" to their German friend. Perhaps this was the reason why they appeared disinclined to linger after dinner. Poor old Sir North had to borrow a sovereign from his son and heir, in order to pay the bill, and as that young gentleman never expected to see it again, the loan did not increase his good-humour. As a rule, the baronet's financial difficulties affected him but little. To-day, however, he could not refrain from blaming himself for having, as he put it, been so infernally idiotic as to give Herr Von Kessler such preposterous odds. If anybody were to tell the story to one of his friends at home, they would simply think he had gone stark, staring mad. His thoughts were unusually sober, for even aided by the Moselle he could not see his way clear to raising the necessary five hundred.

Directly the coach came round, the ladies took possession of the seats they had already occupied. Herr Von Kessler and Lord Charles stood on the pavement, evidently animated by the same intention, namely—that of securing the vacant place by Hetty's side. Karl was too big to be active, and Lord Charles managed to gain the advantage. His foot was on the wheel, and in another minute he would have attained his object, when, in her utter dismay and disappointment, Hetty cried out:

"Oh! Lord Charles, I can't find my parasol. I believe I must

have left it behind me. Would you—*would you* be so very kind as to see if it is inside the Café?"

At her words, he jumped hastily to the ground.

"All right. Keep my place for me. I'll be back directly." And off he ran, only to find when he returned from an unsuccessful search, Herr Von Kessler installed by Hetty's side, and Sir North fussing and fuming at the delay. It was too late to remonstrate, and he had no choice but to scramble up in the rear and get over his vexation as best he might.

"Didn't I do that well?" whispered the girl to her companion, turning upon him a face that was one sparkle of a smile.

"Splendidly," answered Karl, trying ineffectually to stow away his long legs. "I was afraid he had done me. He's such an awfully pushing fellow that I wonder how you can tolerate him."

"I don't. He bores me to death. But what can one do?" she asked, with a charming *moue*.

"The fact of the matter is, I suppose, he's in love, like all the rest of us," sighed Karl sentimentally.

"Well, and if he is, he will have to get out of it. It's not my fault."

"Is that what you say to everybody?" he asked, stooping to pick up the rug which had slipped from their knees.

Hetty made no reply.

"Why don't you answer my question? Do you treat *all* your admirers with equal cruelty?" And he drew the rug high up, ostensibly to protect her from the dust.

"You—you know that I don't."

"Do you mean what you say?"

"Yes," and she tried to avert her eyes. But she couldn't, for all of a sudden a dreadful thing happened which quite took away her breath. That audacious Karl introduced his great big hand under the rug, and seizing hers in his, held it in a long, lingering pressure. Her heart went pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, and yet she could not scold him as she fully realised he deserved to be scolded. On the contrary, a horrible, guilty pleasure ran like electricity through her frame. The utmost she could do was to endeavour to maintain an attitude of neutrality.

"*Liebchen*," he whispered drawing her nearer to his side, "you make me so happy. Do you really care for me—better than for Lord Charles? I can hardly believe it."

Hetty trembled from head to foot. She was incapable of making any reply. A kind of intoxication stole over her senses. The shadowy vastness of the deep blue vault overhead, the stillness of the night, and the glimpse of Paradise suddenly opened out to her, who, ever since she was quite a child, had longed so ardently to love and be loved in return, awed and affected her beyond measure. Speech seemed inadequate to express the flood of emotion that surged up into her heart. Unconsciously almost she nestled closer and closer to him until her head well-nigh rested on his shoulder. The night wind fluttering amongst the trees was not so soft as his voice, nor the moon as tender as the light of his eyes. Ah, well! She was in fairyland. Our moments there are short. Do not let us grudge them to her. What matter how foolish love is, so that it be genuine. It is always beautiful, like the conception of a noble poem, or the strivings of a higher nature, struggling ever upwards, impelled by a vague, half-understood force. Hetty's mood suited Karl's. He was no great talker at the best of times, and moreover North Penywern had just presented him with a light brown cigar, which the ladies kindly insisted upon his smoking. So he puffed and puffed away, as they passed by one quiet village after another, peacefully slumbering in the moon's rays. Somehow the steady tramp, tramp of the horses' feet had a wonderfully soporific effect.

"What a heavenly drive this is! Aren't you sorry it's coming to an end?" Hetty whispered, after a long silence.

Her companion made a remarkable sound. She did not quite understand it, but construed it to signify assent.

The horses seemed to know they were nearing home, for they literally flew past the station and up the High Street. Sir North had to take a steady pull at them before he could bring them to a standstill at the Hotel de l'Europe, where it had been arranged Hetty should be deposited. Very gently, and—to confess the truth—very reluctantly, did the girl draw away her fingers from Karl's fond grasp. They had grown dead and cold. It was Amelia who, with her brutal frankness, first aroused her to a practical conception of the situation.

"Great pig!" exclaimed that young lady indignantly. "No wonder he has been so quiet all the way home. He's fast asleep! Wake up, Mister Karl, wake up!" giving him a vicious dig in the ribs with the point of her parasol.

The victorious jockey gave a grunt similar to the one that had occasioned Hetty a feeling of uncertainty.

"He has over-eaten himself," went on Milly contemptuously. "Really, I couldn't take my eyes off him at dinner. His performances in the knife and fork line quite put his successes between the flags into the shade."

Hetty turned a wrathful countenance upon her friend. If this sort of thing were to continue she felt that she could no longer remain on good terms with Miss Dawkins.

"How can you talk so!" she said reproachfully, bestowing an affectionate glance on Karl, and half expecting to see him rise up and deny the accusations brought against him.

Alas! one was but too true. He slumbered peacefully, soundly, forgetfully. His fair head was thrown back, his mouth was wide open, and even as she gazed, a loud snore made itself audible.

She was very young, very guileless, very loving. Therefore she did what few girls would have done in her place. She forgave him—actually forgave him for going fast asleep in her presence.

She took one last look at him and murmured softly: "Poor Karl, of course he is tired after the race. I never knew before that Milly could be so disagreeable and ill-natured. I don't like her one bit. That horrid boy, North Penywern, is spoiling her altogether. Good night, Karl—good night, *dear* Karl. You have a right to sleep well to-night if any one has."

(To be continued.)

Sold for a Silk Rag.

By MRS. FRANK PENNY,
Author of "CASTE AND CREED," etc.

"There is an hour in each man's life appointed
To make his happiness, if then he seize it."

BEAUMONT and FLETCHER.

It was New Year's Eve at one of the gay military stations of the Central Provinces, India. The ball, given by the officers of the 124th, was in full swing. The large dining-room of the mess bungalow had been turned out and decorated as a ball-room.

Supper was laid in a tent hard by; and now, at a quarter to twelve, the guests were assembling round the well-supplied tables.

The 124th always did things well, but to-night they surpassed themselves, for the general of the division was present. He was a favourite with them all, and they delighted to do him honour. He very rarely gave them the benefit of his company in holiday time; but this was a special occasion; necessity had obliged him to make a tour of inspection at this season.

"Isn't it rather rash of us choosing this night of all others for keeping late hours?" whispered a pretty girl to her partner, as she drew off her long white gloves preparatory to tasting the savoury mock turtle.

"It won't matter for once in a way," he replied; "you need not get up till you please."

"Indeed! And do you suppose for a moment that I could let our regiment parade on New Year's morning without being present? you must have a poor opinion of my *esprit de corps*! Of course I shall get up. Six o'clock, isn't it?"

"A quarter past."

The handsome young fellow by her side looked down into her eyes, and whispered something which brought the colour to her cheeks. His manner, too, was suggestive of happy appropriation; and a stranger would have guessed at the existence of a stronger bond between the two than friendship.

They were not engaged, though they were both desperately in love with each other. Alas! the course of true love did not run smooth in their case; a stern father barred the road to bliss, and caused poor Aimée many heartaches and tears.

But Captain Hamilton was an audacious lover. Such a trifle as the opposition of a stern parent troubled his mind but little. Truth to say, it rather added to the zest of his courtship. Even at this moment the eye of the unsympathetic colonel was upon the young couple with strong disapproval.

The murmur of voices round the supper table increased. Under cover of the noise Aimée said:

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that; you know it is of no use."

"I know nothing of the sort," he replied quickly. "Did you ever yet meet a soldier who was frightened off the field in love or war? Your father will not be able to subdue me with a stare."

"He is looking so annoyed."

"My little darling, you need not be so alarmed. Eat a good supper and drink your champagne; then you will be better prepared to listen to all I have to say to-night—and I have a great deal to say," he concluded impressively.

She gave him a quick apprehensive glance.

"Oh! George!" she protested.

"You heard the good news this morning—that I have got my step? Here, try some of this *pâté-de-foie-gras aspic*; it looks uncommonly good."

He helped her as he spoke. He was a most self-possessed young man, this Captain Hamilton; quite capable of making a good supper and love at the same time.

"Yes, I was told, and I am very glad. I congratulate you. It will compensate a little for your having left the regiment to go into the Staff Corps. I wonder why father hates the Staff Corps so?"

"Because it robs him of his most promising youngsters. How bitterly opposed he was to my going; and all because he thought that in the far, far distance I might make a good adjutant to the regiment. I have been adjutant of the 50th N.I. for the last two years; and now I have got my step."

"Yes; I suppose that in a pecuniary way you have done well;" and she sighed.

He lowered his voice and said impressively :

"Aimée, I can afford to keep a wife now."

But the girl looked distressed at his words, and the suspicion of a tear dimmed her eye.

"Oh, George, my father will never give his consent. You know that he never will."

"He shall give his consent—I intend to make him. See if I don't, you poor frightened little darling! Do you think that stern fathers are never conquered? Only you must have patience. Here, have some more champagne, and some of this trifle. There's nothing like a good meal to build up one's courage. Hallo! what are they doing now? Oh! twelve o'clock, is it? Silence for the C.O. and the general."

Glasses were filled; short speeches were made; and the gong tolled out the hour. Then each turned to his neighbour and good wishes were exchanged. The babel of voices recommenced with the ushering in of the new year.

Very shortly afterwards Captain Hamilton was piloting his companion from the tent to a dimly lighted little ante-room. There, wholly hidden by a large group of crotons, he had his say.

His love-making, like his soldiering, was untainted by timidity or faint-heartedness. It was useless for Aimée to doubt or fear; he would listen to nothing. Unable to resist his pleading she caught something of his hope and enthusiasm, and gave herself up to the enjoyment of the hour.

"A last kiss, and then one turn round the room before that waltz finishes," said George with a happy sigh.

But it was not to be. Gentle Mrs. Baring approached her daughter with a troubled face.

"Oh, Aimée! I have been looking for you everywhere. Your father says that we must go home. He has managed to take cold, and is already quite choking. It is so trying, because he *must* be on parade to-morrow morning. The general will be there and he cannot get off it."

Colonel Baring, who commanded the 124th, was not a man to shirk his duty. His only anxiety now was to get home and apply the usual remedies, in the earnest hope that the troublesome ailment might be staved off. He was annoyed that the necessity had arisen for turning his back on his guests. He

would have liked to have seen the ball out. He was also annoyed with the attentions Captain Hamilton had shown his daughter at supper; and the offence was aggravated by the disappearance of the young couple immediately afterwards. This, together with his embryo cold, conduced to bad temper; and made the drive home anything but pleasant for wife and daughter. He did not dislike Captain Hamilton personally. On the contrary, the colonel recognized in him an unusually smart soldier; but he loathed the Indian Staff Corps. Its higher pay and richer plums lured the young subalterns from the Queen's regiments; and, in his time, he had seen at least a dozen youngsters go from the 124th alone. They had no business, in his opinion, to leave the regiment. It was only debt or love which made them do it. Why couldn't the Staff Corps be properly recruited without having to steal men from British regiments, just as they were beginning to know their work?

Poor Aimée had to listen to a tirade on the subject as they drove home to their bungalow. She knew only too well what it all meant; and, unsupported by her lover, she was thrown back into the old despair. How could George overcome such prejudice? It would be impossible. She knew her father better than he did. It would need nothing short of a miracle to accomplish it.

Colonel Baring put his feet in hot mustard and water and tried all the well-known old household remedies, so fraudulent, so futile in most cases. The sleepy servants were roused from their warm blankets and sent flying in different directions; one for hot water, another for the whisky bottle, a third for the travelling-rugs, a fourth for sweet spirits of nitre.

In their anxiety to please the somewhat imperious master, they brought remedies enough to have treated a whole company of men with influenza.

Mrs. Baring and Aimée ministered patiently and gently to their wheezing patient, until—fortunately for all parties concerned—he fell asleep amongst his blankets and was at peace; at peace except for the portentous snore that shook his frame.

Very early in the morning, before it was light, the ayah crept to the door of the bedroom with the tea tray.

"I am afraid your master is no better; his breathing is very thick," said Mrs. Baring, in answer to the ayah's inquiring look; "however, he must go on parade. I hope his uniform is laid out

ready ; and tell the butler to see that the horse is saddled in good time."

Mrs. Baring returned to the bedside and found her husband awake. He was already firing off his *feu de joie* on Proclamation morning in a volley of sneezes.

"Oh! confound this cold! Get me out some old soft silk handkerchiefs. I feel as if my head would burst," he cried, as soon as he could speak.

Dressing this morning was no easy matter. Never had man a worse or more weeping cold. Every now and again a fit of sneezing held him speechless in its grip. It was with the greatest difficulty that he got himself into his uniform, drank his tea and buckled on his sword. He was convinced, in spite of all his wife could say to the contrary, that he was late. He bustled out of the house, mounted his charger, and galloped to the parade ground.

The English troops were drawn up in line on the opposite side, and on their left the native regiments were in position. All was ready for the eagle eye of the general.

Colonel Baring pulled up as he reached the ground. The general had not yet arrived. It was a relief and a respite, for it would give him time to blow that much-afflicted nose of his once more. The morning air was sharp, for the sun was only just touching the horizon, and—confound it all! here was another fit of sneezing coming on!

Where was his handkerchief? Now, *where* had he put it in the bustle of dressing?

He felt in the cuff of each sleeve. It was not there. He stuck his fingers in the breast of his tunic; of course it was not there; he never carried it in such a place. He looked round at his horsekeeper. No, he did not remember having given it to him to hold.

Horror of horrors! he had come without it! What was he to do?

The knowledge that he had no handkerchief seemed to increase his cold, bad as it already was. The sneezing became more frequent, and, dash it all! his nose began to run!

What would the general say? Never did there exist a sharper eye for appearance than his. The slightest speck would be detected, and the scarlet uniform would show every spot.

It was most distressing, absurd though it may seem. Each moment the value of handkerchiefs rose in his eyes. There is no telling what sum he would not have given for one at that moment. His eyes were affected now, and the landscape was blurred by his influenza-bred tears.

He was riding slowly past the 70th N.I. (to get to his men he would have to pass all the sepoys), and he saw Colonel Smyth at the head of the regiment with two or three of his officers. He rode up to him.

"Can you lend me such a thing as a handkerchief?" he asked in his most conciliatory tones. "I have come without mine, and I have got the most infernal cold in my head."

Colonel Smyth looked a little surprised at such a strange request.

"I have only one, my dear fellow; and, as I have a slight cold also, I really daren't part with it. Have you one, major?" he said, turning to a fellow officer.

"Very sorry; I haven't one to spare."

Colonel Baring's dislike to the Staff Corps was well known, and none of the men asked felt inclined to make a sacrifice on his behalf. And it would have been a sacrifice to have parted with one's only handkerchief on such a cold morning.

Another and yet another officer was asked, but with no better success.

In the distance the general might be seen approaching. It was time—handkerchief or no handkerchief—that Colonel Baring took up his position, for it was to him that the general would first come.

Disheartened by his want of success, and distressed by his constant sneezing, he was passing the 50th without a word. A familiar voice at his elbow cried:

"Good morning, colonel. A happy new year to you! How is your cold?"

"Oh, Hamilton, is that you? Thanks, I'm not at all well. I think I must have the real thing—the real influenza this time. I don't know when I have felt so bad; and, worse luck, I've forgotten my pocket-handkerchief. I suppose you couldn't lend me such a thing?"

There was not much hope in the words as he uttered them. He had been very short and ungracious with the young man

over-night, even though he was his guest. It was hardly likely that he would feel very good-naturedly disposed towards him this morning.

"I can't exactly give it you, for I have only one. But I tell you what I'll do. I'll share it with you."

And Captain Hamilton drew out of his sleeve a large soft, comforting silk handkerchief, the very sight of which was soothing to the afflicted man.

"Here! be quick; catch hold." And the smart young adjutant reined his horse close up to Colonel Baring's side.

He drew his sword, and, as the colonel clutched the coveted article, he sliced it in two, leaving by far the larger share in the hands of the grateful man.

"My good fellow, how shall I ever thank you?" he cried in between terrific trumpet-like blasts.

"Ask me in to breakfast this morning," returned George with unbounded assurance.

The colonel eyed him for a moment, blew his nose again, and nipped the last dislocating sneeze in its bud.

"You cheeky young dog! I know what you mean and what I let myself in for when I say yes. You may come, and you may think yourself lucky to have won her so easily."

He galloped off, and as he went he said to himself:

"He's a smart young fellow, that. A man of such resources must come to the fore sooner or later. Not another in the field—including myself and the general—would have thought of halving a pocket-handkerchief; and with his sword, too! Yes, yes, I shan't be far wrong, though it is not exactly what I wished for Aimée. Pity he belongs to that confounded old Staff Corps. Why couldn't he have stuck to the regiment?"

The review passed off well. The general was pleased to compliment Colonel Baring on his men, and he also had a few words of praise to bestow on the adjutant of the 50th.

Aimée rode on to the field in time to see the march-past.

When the last volley had been fired and the business of the morning was finished, Captain Hamilton managed to get a few words with her.

They shook hands, and exchanged the usual new year greetings.

"Oh, you need not look at your father in that terrified fashion. He has given his consent, and I'm invited to breakfast."

She gave him a startled glance, and then turned away incredulous.

"Don't tease me, George. You know I can't bear it." And her lip actually trembled.

"My darling, I'm not teasing you. It is perfectly true. It was a bargain. Your father sold you to me this morning just before the general came."

"Sold me!"

She began to think that he had taken leave of his senses.

"Yes; sold you for a silk rag—for half a pocket-handkerchief. See, here is the other half," and he pulled the remnant out of his sleeve.

Her troubled face cleared a little, but showed no signs of enlightenment.

"I must go now," he exclaimed. "I'll tell you all about it if you will invite me into that snug little morning-room of yours after breakfast." And with a happy smile he trotted back to his post, for the men were preparing to march to their lines.

When George wants to tease his wife now he tells her that she isn't worth much, for she was "Sold for a Silk Rag."

"Where the Shoe Pinches."

I ONCE read—or had told to me, or dreamt—a little fable to this effect:—A rich man, who had everything that money can bestow, was irritated to the last degree because, on occasions, his breakfast-egg was not boiled to a nicety, and though this misadventure only happened perhaps once in a hundred mornings, the feeling that it might occur any morning, deprived the unfortunate man of all peace of mind. One day, wearied with apprehension, he left the house alone, and, wandering into a lane, cast his eyes upon a beggar, who lay on the grass in the sun doing nothing. The rich man paused to address him:—"You, at least, have no worries," he said, in the bitterness of his spirit, "since you take no meal with regularity and eat what you can get with the best sauce—Hunger." "You err," returned the beggar peevishly; "I am the most miserable creature, because I never know whether I shall have the wild joy of thieving my dinner or the sorry humiliation of accepting it as a dole." The rich man disputed the greater misery of the beggar, and the beggar persisted in stoutly maintaining it: the quarrel soon grew to a height, and the two men became red in the face and were almost beside themselves. "You fools," said a sage who was passing by, "you are both wrong and both right. Are you not aware that no one knows where the shoe pinches but the wearer?"

Pinching, like poverty, is certainly a relative term. The shoe which pinches me agonizingly might be an intoxicatingly easy fit to my next-door neighbour, and *vice versa*. It is generally a case of "*If I were you!*"—as the envious rose on the bush said to the rose that had been gathered and had died in the prince's buttonhole. But, as Owen Meredith says:

"If this were that, or that were this,
What hath been had not been."

In this best of all possible worlds, there is no getting the round people into round holes and the square people into square holes; and we most of us have pinching shoes, and what is more we

have to wear them. Of course there is a Herculean way of disposing of them ; the ancient hero cut the Gordian knot instead of untying it, and we can kick off the painful shoe and go bare-foot, if we choose ; but affection, duty and conventionality usually forbid this line of action, and as we find the shoe so we wear it, with groans and grumblings that cause us to be despised, or with a philosophic dignity or a tender affectionateness that turns the shoe sometimes into a martyr's cross and sometimes into a dear delight. Habit is a great softener ; cooks can roast even in July. After all, the magnitude of the pinching is a mere question of sensitiveness. A neglected wife, with unruly sons and ill-married daughters may be happier than the woman who is surrounded by a devoted family, but whose sweet-tempered husband is unpunctual, and whose well-behaved children have bad teeth and misshapen ears.

The shoe that pinches is ubiquitous ; it touches every side, it comes through all channels—sometimes it pinches the heart, sometimes the pocket, sometimes it pinches our pride and vanity, sometimes our love of order and right, sometimes our personal comfort, our tastes, our idiosyncrasies ; but wherever it presses, that is the tender spot of the wearer, and must be treated with consideration. Because your little toe has no sensations, you are not to make a mock of me because mine is alive with aching nerves and appears to me to be bigger than my whole body. I resent your laughter, and I demand, if not your compassion, at least your respect. Be so good as to recollect that if my melancholy little toe is in anguish, your absurd heel is the seat of fifty woes, the cause of a hundred jeremiads, the reason of your distorted smile, your ungainly carriage, your zig-zag gait, your pettish conversation. Of course it is my private opinion that your heel would cease to trouble you if you would cease to think about it. As Epicurus teaches us, "Pain is neither intolerable nor everlasting, if thou bearest in mind that it has its limits, and if thou addest nothing to it in imagination ;" but so we all say,—yet a mere flea-bite has caused death. The imagination is too strong for us, and it has an uncanny trick of fastening itself on a particular point till it amplifies that spot to gigantic proportions. Given, a pinching shoe and a modicum of thought-power, and in an incredibly short space of time the whole of our being—mind and body—has forced itself into the foot, with shocking conse-

quences. I heard of a gentleman who was so disturbed at a foolish habit his favourite child had acquired of constantly saying, "H'm! h'm!" that he went out of his mind, and the friend who told me of it, sorrowing, was himself often made speechless with annoyance when his wife remarked, "*If I live*, I will do so and so." Pity 'tis, 'tis true. The lunatic asylums are full of people whose shoe has pinched too tight; common-sense or proper pride might have eased the pressure, but, alas! the shoe's victim could not exert himself to follow the wise counsels of the great Roman Emperor: "Take away thy opinion, and then there is taken away the complaint, *I have been harmed*; take away the complaint, *I have been harmed*, and the harm is taken away." To the man who is vexed to madness because his wife simpers or flirts, or mispronounces her words, such wisdom is empty. The curb must be put on when the horse begins to be excited; it is when the shoe first pinches that the poultice to allay the swelling must be applied. "Imagine," says the Emperor in another place—"imagine every one who is grieved at anything, or discontented, to be like a pig which is sacrificed and kicks and screams." This sarcasm is a capital invoker of pride at the outset, when first we begin to be worried by some trivial everyday occurrence, when first we feel an antipathy to a constant visitor stealing over us, when first the ways and manners of our relations and friends seem tiresome; but after the first, it is of no good—pride gets into the scale with the pinching shoe and weighs it down, and we are just pigs sacrificed amidst kicks and screams. Eheu! is there no way to bandage the foot so as to deaden the pinch?

I know of but one recipe for making a pinching shoe wearable: *hug it*. Don't let it weigh you down, but take it fondly in your arms and strain it to your breast. A serpent will not bite you if you collar it bravely, neither will a tight shoe hurt you—or at least not so much—if you accustom yourself to liking being pinched. Believe that all your surroundings are for the best; don't carp at the members of your family and household; don't be hypercritical over their faults and failings. If your young daughter won't come down to prayers, make up your mind that that last half-hour in bed is necessary for her, but for pity's sake don't let her dereliction of duty make you querulous; if your wife is a bad housekeeper, think indulgently of her multifarious avocations and try to feel proud that her poetic mind soars above

gravies, but don't let the forgotten sauces sour your disposition. Caress your pinching shoe, and after a time it will relax its tenacity. Until that happy moment, smile. Pinching shoes, like skeletons in the cupboard and thorns on rose-bushes, are universal, and no one can get rid of his or hers, unless he be very mad or very bad. We must wear and bear them, and it is better to appear happy than to show a dismal face,—better to embrace the inevitable than to squeak and struggle like the pig under the knife.

FAYR MADOC.

A Romance of Modern London.

By CURTIS YORKE,

Author of "HUSH!" "THE MYSTERY OF BELGRAVE SQUARE," "THE BROWN PORTMANTEAU," "DUDLEY," "THE WILD RUTHVENS,"
"THAT LITTLE GIRL," etc., etc.

CHAPTER III.

THE UNFORESEEN.

"Two terrors fright my soul by night and day:
The first is Life, and with her come the years;
A weary, winding train of maidens they,
With forward-fronting eyes too sad for tears;
Upon whose kindred faces, blank and grey
The shadow of a kindred woe appears.
Death is the second terror; who shall say
What form beneath the shrouding mantle nears?
Which way she turn, my soul finds no relief,
My smitten soul may not be comforted;
Alternately she swings from grief to grief,
And poised between them, sways from dread to dread.
For there she dreads because she knows; and here
Because she knows not, inly faints with fear."

BEE was decidedly cross this morning. Her little face, usually so bright and sunshiny, was clouded; her voice was fretful and full of tears. She cried outright when her bread and milk burnt her tongue. She cried again when Douglas playfully pulled her curls—cried because she knocked her elbow against the table; cried more than ever because it rained, and Douglas said she must not stand upon the doorstep to see him off. She tearfully insisted; and then Douglas assumed the stern, elder-brotherly tone which he kept only for rare occasions. But Bee rebelled.

"Will go! *Will* go!" she screamed passionately. And then—oh, sad to relate!—she slapped her brother with all her tiny might, and rushing into her little room, threw herself on the bed, and shrieked and shook with rage.

Douglas vainly tried to pacify her; but the child took no notice; and as he was already late, he went off and left her sitting weeping and unrepentant on the floor.

When he came home at night, he found her waiting as usual at the head of the stairs. As he came up she flung her small body upon him and cried sobbingly:

"Oh, Douglas—Bee was very naughty. Can you never love Bee any more?"

"Are you good now?" he said, stooping to kiss her.

"Yes—quite, *quite* good"—burrowing her little head under his arm. "But Bee has *such* a headache."

"That's with crying so much this morning," he answered.

But he looked at her anxiously; for her face was unnaturally flushed, her eyes heavy, and her hands burning hot.

She would not eat anything at tea-time. It hurt her throat, she said. And all the rest of the evening she sat curled up on Douglas's knee, leaning her hot little head against his shoulder, her usually busy tongue strangely silent.

"What a quiet little woman it is to-night," he said at last, smoothing her hair tenderly.

"Want to go to bed," was the querulous answer. "Legs ache." And the ready tears coursed down her cheeks again.

A sharp fear sprang to life in Douglas's heart. Was the child going to be ill?—perhaps to die. Was *everything* going to be taken from him?

He put her to bed, and watched beside her until she went to sleep. He himself slept that night on the sofa in the sitting-room. But he did not undress; he felt too anxious. All night Bee tossed and turned, and moaned in her sleep, and towards morning became very ill. Mrs. Dobbs, whom Douglas called as soon as he heard her stir, "hoped to goodness" it might not be scarlet fever.

At the very mention of that dread scourge, the boy's face grew pale. There had been two cases at the lower end of the street, he knew.

"Do you think it looks like scarlet fever?" he asked hurriedly.

"Well, Master Conrath, which I can only say by my own sister's child, as sweet a little boy as ever could be—which was took in the self-same way, and no notice taken, thinking it just a cold, and dead and stiff in the inside of five days—which broke 'is mother's 'eart, and never smiled to speak of since. I should *had* advise the doctor, Master Conrath—not that they know much when all's said and done, but takes a load off the mind in illness,

which of course they're paid for." Here Mrs. Dobbs stopped for breath, and laid her hand on her heart with a mournful sigh.

Douglas hurried off at once, and was fortunate in finding the doctor at home.

It was not scarlet fever, the latter said, when he had taken a brief survey of his little patient; but it was a kind of low lingering fever, which might hang about her for an indefinite time.

"There have been several cases of it in the neighbourhood," went on Dr. Glossop, pursing out his lips as he replaced his watch in his pocket.

"Is it—is it dangerous?" asked the boy unsteadily.

"Well—er—one or two cases have ended fatally," was the answer, after a pause. "But I hope, with proper care—— By the way, who is to nurse her? I don't suppose your landlady will have either the time or the wish—or the capability for that matter. You had better get some respectable woman——"

But Douglas interrupted him.

"I shall nurse her," he said shortly. "If there is anything I can't do, I daresay Mrs. Dobbs will help me. She is a kind-hearted woman enough, and my little sister is fond of her."

"But—you have to be out all day, I understand," said the doctor, bending his keen grey eyes on the resolute young face beside him.

"I shall arrange that," was the quiet answer.

"Well, well—I shall send round the medicine, and look in again this evening. It is a pity she is in that little box of a room. Is there no other they can let her have?"

"Mine is larger," the boy answered. "But it is awfully cold and draughty. At least, for her it would be. But this room is generally pretty comfortable. We might have her bed moved in here."

"It's more airy, certainly," assented Dr. Glossop. "Yes, that might do. Let it be done at once."

Bee was pleased for a time by the change, and tried to smile; but presently she began to cry because her throat hurt her so, she said. When they were left alone again, Douglas took her in his arms with soothing tender words, and she buried her head in his neck, where after sobbing weariedly for nearly an hour, she fell into an uneasy sleep. When he had laid her down again, Douglas sat for some time leaning his head on his hand, in anxious

harassed thought. If he remained at home to nurse Bee, what would become of his duties at the office? It was hardly likely that his employers would keep his situation open for him for any length of time; even if they did, they certainly would not pay his salary. And how could he procure the nourishing food Bee would require, and meet all the expenses incidental to illness, with nothing coming in?

"God knows it was hard enough before to keep things going," he muttered. "What on earth am I to do?"

Presently he rose and went in search of Mrs. Dobbs; for he wanted her to remain with Bee for half-an-hour while he went along to Little Queen Street to explain matters to Mr. Debenham (who, by the way, was the senior partner). Mrs. Dobbs consented after some little demur; for, as she expressed it, she was "that busy she didn't know which way to turn."

Douglas set off at a sharp run, and arrived at his destination considerably out of breath. As it happened, Mr. Debenham was not there. Mr. Carslake was there, however; and, unfortunately, he was in a very bad temper. He had not been in bed all night, and had lost considerably more money at cards than he could afford. Further, he had partaken freely of very doubtful champagne, and, in consequence, had a splitting headache. So, in the first place, he reprimanded Douglas sharply for his tardy appearance, and in the second place told him not too mildly that if there was any question of his not attending to his duties as usual, he had better give up his situation altogether.

The hot blood rushed to the boy's face and receded again, leaving it deadly pale. He opened his lips to speak, then closed them again, and turned his eyes half-imploringly, half-defiantly to Mr. Carslake's. That gentleman was sitting sideways in an arm-chair with one leg thrown carelessly over the arm thereof. In one hand he held a cigar, which, apparently, he had not yet had the energy to light; in the other he held an open letter.

He was a sandy-haired, pale-eyed youth, thin and lanky. He spoke with a lisp, and dressed in the extreme of the prevailing fashion.

"You mean," Douglas said slowly after a minute, "that you dismiss me—that I need not come back again?"

"That is just exactly what I mean," was the sharp answer.

"So be off, and shut the door. There's a most infernal draught coming in."

But the lad stood still.

"I should like to wait to see Mr. Debenham," he said, speaking very low and steadily.

Mr. Carslake rose to his feet with violence.

"Confound you! you cheeky young beggar!" he exclaimed. "Do you think my authority is not enough for your dismissal? Take yourself off at once. Do you hear? What are you waiting for? You had your week's wages the day before yesterday. You don't expect to be paid for one day's service I should hope?" And here followed some forcible language, which, as it happened, fell upon the empty air, for the boy was gone. Mr. Carslake threw himself into his chair again, and forgot all about the matter in less than two minutes—having a good deal to think of that morning.

Douglas went slowly downstairs, and out into the street, where the bright winter sun was shining merrily upon the half-melted snow which had fallen the night before. A dazed sense of unreality possessed him. He tried to make himself understand that he had lost his situation—that he had no hope of another—that if he had he could not leave Bee—that he had to face the prospect of finding himself utterly penniless in a very few days. But as yet the conviction conveyed no special meaning to his brain. He only felt a dull throbbing of head and heart—as though they were only half awakened to pain. He noticed in a mechanical kind of way many things in the busy streets of which on other days he was altogether unconscious. The ever-shifting, hurrying crowds of horses and carriages, of drays and omnibuses, of men and women and children, of sad faces and merry ones, all seemed photographed on his brain with a curiously vivid distinctness. He noted the sharp brilliance of the snow-wreathed Houses of Parliament against the pale softness of the December sky. He was intensely aware of the cries of the street vendors, the clang and roll of wheels and horses' feet on the fast freezing roadways. He felt like the spectator of some monotonous yet life-like panorama. But as he neared Garth Street this sense of apathy left him, and gave place to a sharp raging anxiety. *What was he to do?* What would become of him and of Bee? He saw nothing but black despair whichever way he looked.

Bee was moaning feverishly when he went in. Mrs. Dobbs was not with her, and Douglas felt a sudden unreasoning anger as he heard the child asking, with the piteous insistence of an oft-repeated request, for "just a little drink of water." Then he remembered that Mrs. Dobbs had all her own manifold duties to attend to—and that nursing is not included in the duties of a landlady. So with the smile he always kept for Bee, he held the tumbler to her lips, and smoothed and turned her hot tumbled pillow. Then he sat beside her, talking to her and patiently beginning story after story (only to be told crossly that "that was not a nice one") until Mrs. Dobbs came up with a basin of soup—which the small invalid refused with many tears. Douglas forgot that he had not had his own dinner, for Bee was restless and fretful, and insisted upon his sitting close beside her that she might hold his hand.

And so the day wore on.

Snow fell heavily in the afternoon, and night came on early. Bee began to wander, crying piteously for "Douglas"—"Douglas"—and pushing him away impatiently when he whispered that he was beside her and that he would never leave her.

It was quite dark; the candle was lighted and the snowy night shut out, when Dr. Glossop came, looked at Bee's flushed face and shining eyes, shook his head, and after asking a few questions and leaving a few directions, hurried away again.

After all, how little we can do—with all our science and all our discoveries—against these insidious relentless foes, disease and death! Little more than "put drugs of which we know little, into bodies of which we know less!"

As Douglas sat through the long winter night listening to the sobbing wind, and counting the hours which Big Ben's deep voice rolled solemnly out over Westminster, it seemed to him that Bee was already doomed, that nothing could save her.

There are times when nothing but sorrow seems possible, because of the waves of sorrow that have gone before.

The boy's loving, protective nature, hungry and unsatisfied in the loss of his mother, had wrapped itself almost fiercely round the one thing left him—his little sister. He always thought of her as his sister, and no sister could have been dearer. And he was just in the nervous, half-morbid mood to dread that because he could not face life again without her she would be taken from him.

The long dreary night, with its ever-pressing sense of weariness kept at bay by sharp anxiety, stole away and gave place to morning, and morning again wore into night. And so the days went on until a week had passed—a week that insensibly melted into a fortnight. Gradually the fever abated, and Bee began to grow stronger day by day. Dr. Glossop came but seldom now, and when he did his plain, rugged face always wore a cheerful smile. He was a warm-hearted little man, a bachelor, and if anything preferred his poor patients to his richer ones. An impression prevailed in the neighbourhood that he was possessed of a comfortable independent fortune, though, as a matter of fact, he was not particularly well off, and gave away a good deal more than he could afford.

One afternoon, about a fortnight after Christmas—such a sad, wretched Christmas it had been!—Douglas had wrapped Bee in a shawl, and allowed her to sit up for a little time upon his knee. They had had a brief battle over a cup of beef-tea, which the child said was “nasty,” and Douglas represented was to make her strong and well again, so that she might once more be his “little housekeeper.”

“It makes me tired to take ‘it, Douglas dear,” she murmured plaintively.

“Oh no, little one,” he said, stroking her head, from which all the bright curls had been cut away; “you only think so because you don’t want to take it.”

“Perhaps,” assented the child wearily, as she swallowed another spoonful. “Why does it make people more tired to do things they don’t want to do than things they do?” she added somewhat ambiguously.

“I don’t know, little one,” was the sober answer.

“Do you feel that way too, Douglas?”

“Yes, dear, often. Now just one more spoonful, and then I think you must lie down again.”

When he had put her into bed, he mended the fire and instituted a search for the dirty old doll which only came second to himself in Bee’s heart. Then he moved the table with his writing close to the bedside. For he had got some more copying work within the last few days, and, poorly paid though it was, it was all he had to depend upon now, and he worked at it every spare moment. It would be finished to-day, however, and he had no prospect of more in the meantime.

A bitter sense of injustice was fast warping the boy's nature. He was willing to work hard and constantly—to do without everything save the barest necessities ; he had doggedly set his mind to conquer the adverse fate that threatened him. But of what use was it? Everything seemed to be against him. All life seemed set in a minor, wailing key. What he had to look forward to was the prospect of Bee weak and ailing always, and pining for want of the comforts he could not give her—of watching her fade away from him at last, not from disease, but from sheer starvation. He was worn out, too, by these weeks of nursing and anxiety, therefore an easier prey than usual to despondency.

For the first time he thought seriously of disregarding his promise to his mother and breaking his own pride by applying to his uncle, Evan Conrath. But some strange prescience warned him that only refusal and insult awaited him in that quarter.

He thought these feverish thoughts independently of his writing, which he did, to a certain extent, mechanically.

As he finished the last page, he raised his head and met the grave, earnest look of Bee's soft grey eyes, which had been watching him intently and silently for the last half-hour.

"Douglas, why do you always look so sorry?" she said in her weak little voice. "Is it because I am in bed, or because mammy is away?"

Douglas did not answer. He was leaning his elbow on the table, staring into the fire.

"Am I going away like mammy did?" Bee went wistfully on after a minute.

"My little Bee, I hope not," was the unsteady answer.

"If I do," pursued the child—"if I *have* to go away and be in Heaven where mammy is, do you s'pose God would let me be a little housekeeper to mammy until you come?"

"Don't say things like that, little one," was the indistinct answer.

"Or perhaps I would have to be a housekeeper to one of the angels," observed Bee thoughtfully. "But I daresay He'll let me stay with you," she added in a consoling little murmur. "You see, you need me more than the angels do, and mammy has got father."

Douglas drew the close-cropped little head within his arm without speaking.

There was a long silence after that. The dusk deepened ; the firelight danced coquettishly on the walls.

Suddenly Mrs. Dobbs put her head in at the door.

"There's a gentleman downstairs wants to see you, Master Conrath," she said somewhat resentfully, for she was far from thin, and the stairs were steep and long. "I told him to come up, but he said as how I was to come and tell you."

And Mrs. Dobbs (who like most people had her days of gloom and bad temper, of which this was one) shut the door with a bang, and flounced heavily downstairs again.

Douglas followed her and found a tall young man standing in the grimy, draughty passage, whom, to his surprise, he recognized as Mr. Debenham.

"How are you, Conrath?" said this gentleman in a pleasant, languid voice. "I came to have a little talk with you. I only got back to town this morning, and Mr. Carslake told me you had left. Your little sister is ill, I am sorry to hear."

"Yes, she has been very ill, but she is getting better, thank you. I'm afraid," he added hesitatingly, "I can hardly ask you to come upstairs. Her bed has been moved into the sitting-room, and it is not——" He paused, and his face flushed somewhat.

But Debenham answered courteously :

"If you and she have no objections, I should like to see your little sister. I have brought a few grapes for her."

His eyes looked so kindly as he spoke that Douglas hesitated no longer, and preceded his visitor up the long dark stairs until they reached the attics.

In spite of the scanty furniture and the uncarpeted floor, the room looked clean and homelike. The fire shone pleasantly on the whitewashed walls, on Captain Conrath's sword and spurs, and on Bee's pale baby face, with its aureole of short feathery hair. She smiled when Mr. Debenham spoke to her, and opened her mouth obediently for him to pop a grape into it. He laid the cool tempting-looking bunch on the coverlet, and stroked her hair with a strangely tender look in his eyes. Then he sighed a little, and sat down without speaking. He had a quiet, dark face, with tired, rather sad-looking, grey eyes, and a kind, well-shaped mouth. He sat quite silent for some time, pulling his moustache thoughtfully, while Douglas drew down the blind and lit the candle. Then he roused himself, and said abruptly :

"Your little sister reminds me very much of a child sister of my own, who died long ago. How old is she?"

"She is nearly seven," Douglas answered after a moment's hesitation.

"Seven in June," put in Bee's voice.

Mr. Debenham looked surprised.

"I should have thought her older than that," he said thoughtfully. "My little sister was nearly ten." Then he added in his usual languid tone, "By the way, Conrath, I have arranged with Mr. Carslake that your place is to be kept open for you. I don't care to have strange lads about the place, and you have got into our ways. In short, I don't want to part with you if I can help it. I have told Forbes to take your duties for the next week or two. And as for your salary, that—er—will be all right, you know. I shall see that you get it weekly as usual."

The colour rushed to young Conrath's face. He rose to his feet, and uttered a few broken, half-articulate words. Then he sat down again, and just laid his head down on Bee's pillow, his heart too full for speech. But in a few moments he had recovered himself, and his eyes met Mr. Debenham's with a look in them that thanked the other better than any mere words could have done. It was a look of intense, almost passionate gratitude and relief. Presently he said in a very low voice:

"I cannot tell you how grateful I am, Mr. Debenham. You don't know what it—means to me."

But Debenham, with a comprehending nod, had turned to speak to little Bee, who was watching him furtively and approvingly from beneath her long lashes.

"Was your little sister the very same size as me?" she asked gravely, when she had answered his kindly questions in her quaint old-fashioned way.

"Yes, I think so," he made answer.

"Has she gone to Heaven?" she continued, fixing her great grey eyes on his. Then as he did not speak, she added, with a quivering lip, "My mammy went to Heaven. She will never come back, Douglas says, and I want her so dreadfully." And she burst into a fit of passionate crying.

With a troubled look on his kind face, Debenham rose to go; but as he held out his hand to Douglas Bee sobbed out:

"No, no; don't want you to go away. You have a nice

face, and Bee wants to hear about that little sister that's in Heaven."

The young man good-naturedly enough sat down again, and Bee, having dried her tears upon Douglas's handkerchief, subjected the visitor to a searching examination upon his life and habits in general—past, present and future. He, evidently amused, answered with edifying gravity, and found himself to his surprise exerting himself to be agreeable in a way which would have surprised considerably most of his acquaintances, who only knew him as a rather haughty and not at all communicative young man.

When Bee had ascertained, by careful and minute inquiry, that Mr. Debenham had no more little sisters, no brothers, no babies of his own, and no immediate prospect of nor desire for any, that he had once possessed a horse, but never, to his recollection, a kitten, with other equally important information, she announced with a contented little sigh :

"I like you. You are funny and nice, and your face looks kind when you laugh. I hope you'll have some nice little babies of your own quite soon."

Then, without further remark, she coiled herself up and fell fast asleep.

Debenham remained for some time longer, talking in a low voice to Douglas, and encouraging him to speak freely of his perplexities and troubles and aspirations. The lad interested him more than ever. He felt a vague regret that he was not rich enough to be a small Providence to him by "giving him a start" in some line where his abilities would find scope and appreciation.

We are prone, you know, to indulge philanthropic intentions regarding our fellow-men—when we know our circumstances forbid our carrying them out. Too often, I fear, we find that when our circumstances change our ideas are apt to change also. We find that "charity begins at home," that "we really do not feel that we are called upon," that "there are other claims upon us," etc., etc. In short, that a thousand obstacles stand between us and the good we would but may not do.

To do Ralph Debenham all justice, however, he never lost an opportunity of doing his fellow-creatures a good turn—provided he hadn't to exert himself much personally. But upon this

occasion he really had exerted himself. He could hardly have told what had impelled him to penetrate the hitherto unknown region of Garth Street on this bitter winter afternoon (it was an afternoon, too, for which he had several congenial engagements) to pay a visit to his senior office boy and his little sick sister. It was an entirely unprecedented thing for him to do. He had wondered at himself lazily as he stood on the bleak doorstep. He had wondered at himself still more as he climbed the dark and unsavoury staircase leading to young Conrath's poorly-furnished attic. But he wondered less as he talked to the lad—talked almost as he might have talked to a younger brother of his own—and found what clear intelligence and power of reasoning the young fellow had, what deeply-rooted ambition and latent indomitable will.

"And, by Jove!" he said to himself, as he walked down Garth Street half-an-hour later in the illusive hope of finding a hansom, "he's a thorough-bred young fellow, as well as a clever one. Conrath—Conrath," he mused; "the name seems familiar to me somehow."

He half resolved to raise his protégé to a more responsible and therefore more lucrative position in the office; for, as I have said, he was the senior partner, and had more to say on matters connected with the firm than Carslake, who, by the way, rather disliked young Conrath, and snubbed him whenever an opportunity offered.

After that afternoon, Debenham often "looked in," as he put it, at Garth Street, always bringing some little gift of toys, or fruit, or sweetmeats for Bee, and listening in his lazy, good-natured way to her innocent chatter, which amused him immensely. He had long talks with Douglas, too, and got to know the boy thoroughly—ay, and to respect him.

As the days went on, the small invalid gradually gained strength, and looked almost her own bonnie, winsome self again. She eagerly insisted upon taking up her self-imposed "house-keeping" duties; and Douglas soon felt safe in leaving her alone as he used to do.

Thus life to these two Garth Street waifs looked bright and possible once more.

CHAPTER IV.

SAIONARA !

"The same old baffling questions! O, my friend,
I cannot answer them. In vain I send
My soul into the dark, where never burn
The lamps of science, nor the natural light
Of Reason's sun and stars! I cannot learn
Their great and solemn meanings, nor discern
The awful secrets of the eyes which turn
Evermore on us through the day and night
With silent challenge, and a dumb demand,
Proffering the riddles of the dread unknown,
Like the calm sphinxes with their eyes of stone,
Questioning the centuries from their veils of sand!
I have no answer for myself or thee,
Save that I learned beside my mother's knee,
'All is of God that is, and is to be;
And God is good.' Let this suffice us still,
Resting in childlike trust upon His will
Who moves to His great ends unthwarted by the ill!"

WHITTIER.

A YEAR had passed, an uneventful year, as far as Bee and Douglas were concerned. He had grown taller and somewhat thinner; all the boyishness had gone from his face, leaving it graver and more thoughtful than such a young face ought to be. There was an almost stern look about the eyes and lips at times which sat there strangely enough. And in his heart the seed of ambition which had sprung to restless life on the night when he read his uncle's letter waxed stronger and lustier every day.

Bee, too, had grown taller, her features were sharper; she was, perhaps, hardly so pretty as she had been a year ago, but it was a very sweet little face, and the eyes and the expression were both beautiful.

It was a lonely life they led, and yet it had its pleasures too—pleasures that to most people would have seemed trivial and bare enough. Sundays were Bee's red-letter days, always; for on Sundays Douglas was with her all day, and she could pet him and hang about him to her heart's content. She was a lovingly demonstrative little creature, and Douglas, naturally, was her hero and ideal of perfection. His love for her, though deeper, was less demonstrative, and took the form of a constant

thoughtful care and uniform tenderness, with an occasional silent caress, or still rarer kiss. These kisses Bee prized very highly. It was touching to see how the young fellow tried to do his best to let his love fill the place of the mother-love the little one had lost; how careful he was of her health, how anxious to brighten her lonely childhood, and to compensate her for long solitary hours when he had to be away from her. He managed generally to run home for a minute or two during his dinner-hour, just to see that she was all right, but he felt sadly conscious that she was far too much alone. And yet—what could he do?

Her clothing, too, worried him secretly. For she was still wearing the clumsily-made black frock Mrs. Dobbs had got for her more than a year ago; it was not only woefully shabby now, but far above her knees, and Douglas made up his mind that she must have a new one. He had a vague idea also that most of her other clothes wanted renewing as well, and he hadn't the slightest idea how to set about it. He shrank from sending the child out with Mrs. Dobbs; for a long course of troubles and misfortunes had driven that good woman to seek consolation in the daily—indeed, hourly—consumption of a beverage which she vaguely alluded to as "unsweetened," and as this beverage affected not only her temper but her judgment and her actions as well, she was not at all times either a pleasant or a reliable companion. Douglas used to lie awake at nights, thinking the matter over, and finally came to the conclusion that he would seize an early morning hour, when Mrs. Dobbs might perchance be more consecutive in her ideas than was likely later in the day, and make out a list from her dictation as to what the child really required, and the probable maximum cost thereof. This—after one or two attempts rendered futile by Mrs. Dobbs's launching out into mournful reminiscences of palmier days ere "Dobbs" had left his country at that country's expense—was at length accomplished, and one fine Saturday afternoon Douglas and his little charge set off in search of a much-advertised outfitting establishment in the "far east."

They were quite a jovial pair that day. To be sure, Douglas had considerably less money to spend than his generous heart could have wished. But he had long ago learned to "cut his coat according to his cloth," and had even essayed the herculean task of cutting without any cloth at all. And, after all, he was

only a lad, despite his cares and responsibilities ; the sky was blue ; the sun was shining ; and he was going to spend money on the creature he loved best in all the world. So he felt comparatively joyous and light-hearted.

As for Bee, she danced along in the sunshine, holding Douglas's hand tightly and proudly, and talking literally without cessation all the way. It was nothing to her that the little cap that rested upon her sunny hair was rusty and shabby, that her frock was brief to oddity, and that her cloak was well-fitted to bear her other garments company. At least, it had been nothing to her until that morning, when Douglas had told her he was going to replace these shabby garments by new ones. Then her baby-eyes had twinkled with anticipation and excitement. They were twinkling now. What woman-child from its very cradle is insensible to the joys of something new to wear ?

It was a long time since Bee had been out, for the weather had been cold, wet, and boisterous, and she had had a slight cold. Thus everything she saw to-day delighted her.

She insisted on Douglas lifting her up to watch the steamers and coal barges plying to and fro under Westminster Bridge. The sun shone on the water, and transformed the rippling, dirty wavelets into dull broken gold. Bee stretched out her arms to the dancing brightness lovingly. She almost wept to see the limp body of a drowned cat swept down the river's broad bosom. She screamed with ecstatic laughter at one or two adventurous youths who had chosen Father Thames as the field of a watery race. She held her breath with excitement to watch the funnels of the steamers bend, as though by some invisible spirit agency, as they passed under the arches. At last Douglas, with some difficulty, persuaded her to leave this thrilling scene, and she trotted on again, along the Embankment, past Blackfriars Railway Station, through the busy, roaring vortex of Ludgate Hill, and thence into the labyrinth of London east of St. Paul's.

Their final destination was reached at last, and then the great business of the day began. It was an amusing, and yet perhaps a somewhat pathetic sight, to see the perplexed earnestness with which Douglas made his purchases, trying to reconcile what his taste approved with what his purse could afford. He felt very much at sea, and longed forlornly for some feminine assistance. But there was no shadow of care in the unsubdued glee with which

little Bee gazed at her small person in the tall mirrors, as various "ready-made," frocks were tried on—then cloaks, and finally, hats. It went to the boy's heart that he could not buy one of the various rich and elegant little costumes which lay or hung about everywhere; but he turned away from the "what might be" to the "what was," and stoically chose an inexpensive, but neatly-made brown frock and cloak, and a soft little brown tweed cap to match.

"Can't I put them all on now, Douglas?" Bee whispered excitedly. "Oh, Douglas, *do* let me put them on now."

"No, Bee, not just now. Come along, darling; we have other things to get, you know."

With a sigh the little one acquiesced, and Douglas proceeded to examine the list he held. It puzzled him not a little, and he knitted his brows in dire perplexity.

The saleswoman of the department where they then were (a cheery-faced little woman with grey curly hair) seemed to divine his difficulty, and said pleasantly:

"Is there anything else, sir, do you think? If you should want any underclothing for the little miss, I could perhaps select for you, if you will tell me what prices I may go to."

With an expression of relief, and a few courteous words of thanks, he handed her the paper, and after some time all the purchases were made, even to a stout little pair of shoes.

To Bee's disappointment, Douglas ordered the parcel to be sent home, and they sallied forth into the busy streets again. By this time it was half-past five, and Douglas, seeing the little one's wistful though silent glance at the window of an aerated bread shop, committed the final extravagance of ordering tea and cakes for two, and thereby delighting Bee's small soul. They had a little marble table all to themselves, from which she could hardly be persuaded to tear herself away.

When they came out it was almost dark and the lamps were lighted. Douglas hailed a passing omnibus, which took them to Charing Cross; and from thence they walked down Whitehall, and so home.

"Douglas, don't you wish you could go in an omnibus every day?" Bee said gleefully, as she pranced along Garth Street at her brother's side. "I never was in one before. When you are quite a man and I am quite tall with long dresses—then shall we go in an omnibus every day?"

Douglas laughed a little.

"Perhaps we shall be rich enough to drive in a hansom by that time, Bee."

"One of these nice little carriages where the man sits up at the back, and holds the reins over the top?" queried the child excitedly.

"Oh! Douglas—*shall* we? Does Mr. Debenham drive in one?"

"Yes—often."

"Douglas, why does he never come now?"

"I don't know. Busy, perhaps."

"He hasn't come for ever such a long time," went on Bee, as she climbed the doorstep of No. 13—"not since long, long before Christmas. And the last time he didn't laugh—not once. And his face was quite sorry and tired, like yours used to be when I was ill in bed."

As a matter of fact there were good enough reasons for Mr. Debenham's face looking "sorry and tired." The firm of Debenham and Carslake, never a very prosperous concern, had of late been less so than ever, and the occasions were not few when both partners found themselves unpleasantly short of both ready money and credit. Debenham had other causes of worry besides, and the combined strain affected even his equable temperament to a degree which rendered him moody and irritable, and very unlike himself generally.

Douglas—who, by the way, had had his salary raised twice during the past year, and was now sole clerk of the establishment—had suspected of late that things were not going well with his employers, and the suspicion had, naturally, disquieted him not a little. Bee's words just now had set him thinking again, and he answered her absently and at random as they toiled up the long stairs to their rooms. The fire was out, and all was darkness. But when Douglas had struck a match and lit a candle, Bee uttered a shrill little chirp of joy; for there on the table lay a large brown paper parcel.

Whereupon followed—for Bee, at least—a most interesting half-hour in examining all her new "things," while Douglas leaned across the table and watched her with grave amused eyes, in which there was yet a suspicion of sadness. When the inspection was over, and the hat, cloak and boots had been once more tried on, the child climbed upon Douglas's knee and nestled her head against his neck.

"Thank you so much for all these lovely things," she whispered. "I love you so much, Douglas. I will always be good and never naughty."

In a sudden and rare impulse of tenderness he caught her to him and kissed the loving upturned eyes.

"My darling wee thing," he said fondly, "you are always good. I only wish I could buy you far prettier things. And so I will, some day. Just you wait and see." Then he added after a second or two, "Suppose we got rich, and went away from here, where should you like to live, Bee?"

"Are we going away from here?" she asked, raising wondering eyes to his, and answering one question with another, after the fashion of childhood.

"No, not yet. But we shall some day, when I make all that money I told you about the other night. Should you like to live far away in the country, where there are lovely flowers and trees—and have a horse to ride, and lots of pretty frocks, and all the books you could possibly wish for? You would like that—wouldn't you?"

Bee did not answer for a minute; then she said, shaking her head slowly:

"No, I wouldn't like that so well as to live on the bridge where we were to-day. Oh, Douglas, I should like to live there."

Douglas laughed heartily.

"You little goose! Nobody lives on bridges."

"Well, we could be the very first people who had ever lived on one," she said thoughtfully. "But of course you know I should live wherever *you* did." And she hugged him in her usual rapturous fashion.

When she had gone to bed, with her new clothes placed in a conspicuous position on a chair, so that she should see them first thing on waking in the morning, Douglas drew a chair to the table and brought out his writing. But to-night he had no copying of crabbed manuscripts to do. He was not copying anything at all, but writing on both sides of variously-sized pieces of paper, and evidently composing as he went along. For he had an idea that he had it in him to become an author. Not an altogether uncommon idea, to be sure, with young souls just beginning the world, who imagine they see life and death and sin and error from a totally new point of view, and burn to communicate their

old-new impressions and reflections to the reading public. Young Conrath, however, was not fired by a desire to reform the world, but by a desire to reform his own fortunes. Literature was to be to him not an idol, but a slave—a means to an end. He did not consider himself a genius—for, young as he was, he was not a fool—but he had resolved to work his way up, however slowly, and to take his place, not on the pinnacle which harbours genius, but in the no less honourable ranks of recognized talent. Nor did he intend to make his pen his sole hope of livelihood. It was only to be a side-wind.

As yet his efforts had not been successful. The literary attempts of a lad of sixteen are not usually characterized by either power, or brilliancy, or careful composition, or faultless grammar; and Douglas's productions errèd in all these particulars. To do him justice, he had the sense to see they fell short somewhere, and most of them were torn up almost as soon as they were finished. Only one had eventually, after tender care and pruning, found its way to the editor of some popular magazine, who had promptly returned it without comment of any kind.

But the strong, almost fierce, "*I will!*" in the lad kept his heart from failing. Given health and an indomitable will, and circumstances rarely fail to yield to never-ceasing hard work, hand-in-hand with a set purpose.

"*To conquer fame and fortune!*"

The words of his dream were always present with this heavily-handicapped young mariner on life's stormy sea. They seemed to ring in his ears night and day; they nerved his heart for that hardest of all tasks, *to wait*—not idly, but in doing the work that lay nearest, and doing it as well as he "knew how."

To-night he read over his closely-written sheets with a contemptuous smile, then tore them ruthlessly into fragments and flung them into the fireplace. After sitting for some time with his head resting dejectedly on his hands, he took down one of a pile of tattered school-books and applied himself to hard study until far on in the morning.

* * * * *

It was now May—May in her loveliest, sweetest guise, warm and sunny and flower-scented. Mayfair and Belgravia were well launched upon their yearly hard treadmill of never-ending gaiety, and the golden-hued butterfly existence of fashion's votaries

looked fair as apples of Sodom to those who could not see—or had not reached—the dust and ashes within.

In the small attic-floor in Garth Street with which we have become familiar, however, there lay once more a heavy shadow. For Debenham and Carslake had become bankrupt, and the offices in Little Queen Street were closed. Thus Douglas Conrath was on the look-out for another situation. This last, as some of my readers may—or may not—have had occasion to know, is apt to become a soul-sickening occupation enough, and one of which a very little goes a very long way. Its weariness had been lightened for Douglas, however, by a small but unexpected piece of good luck. He had had a short story accepted by one of the shilling magazines; and though he had received comparatively little remuneration for it, the very fact of its having been accepted brightened the mental horizon of the young author wonderfully. And it wanted brightening sadly, for what lay between looked black enough. But Bee was another point of brightness. She was growing more “old-fashioned” and companionable every day. Douglas often found himself talking to her almost as though she were grown up; and she really was a singularly wise little woman for her years. She could read now, quite well; and read aloud to Douglas for half-an-hour every evening, struggling over the big words and discussing the story—or whatever it might be—afterwards, in a way that convulsed her listener with laughter.

They were far from unhappy at this time, though the dread wolf of starvation prowled so terribly near their door. They had but little to eat, and that little of the plainest; but they had youth and health and hope—and they loved each other.

On Sundays they sometimes went to hear service in Westminster Abbey, where the music made Bee think of Heaven, where “mammy” was. Douglas himself did not believe much in church-going, but he had a vague idea that he ought to attend to the morals of the “little one” as well as her education. Often on week days he would take her to one of the free libraries—for alas! he had plenty of time now—where she used to sit as still as a mouse, looking at some picture-book while he pursued some deep branch of study. But as a rule she found these days slow, and much preferred being taken for a long walk, a pleasure in which Douglas indulged her whenever he could, for the child looked pale and was growing fast. Bee’s favourite expedition was

to Temple Gardens, where they used to spend hours at a time when the weather was fine, and when Douglas had no prospective situations to see after. He used to take whatever book he was studying at the time, with his pencil and note-book, and sit on one of the seats under the trees, while Bee ran up and down the walks and round the flower-beds, coming back every few minutes to lay her little head on his knee and tell him she was "so happy," and ask if she was "his baby." And the birds sang, and the sun shone, and the busy life of London roared round them, present yet invisible. Drowsy, sunny Temple Gardens! Who could imagine, among your trees and flowers and peaceful twitter of birds, how near you lie to the great heart of the never-resting city, with its sin and care and sorrow!

One June afternoon, while Bee was careering along the walk nearest the river in pursuit of a smoky town butterfly, which fondly imagined itself to be a white one, an old lady and gentleman who were coming from the opposite direction stopped and spoke to her.

"What's your name, my dear?" said the old lady, who looked nervous and somewhat excited.

"My name is Bee, and then Conrath," the child replied with dignity.

For though Bee was only a poor little girl who lived in an attic, she was not accustomed to be spoken to by strangers, and she did not like it.

"And where do you live?" said the old gentleman in a hard rasping voice.

"In Garth Street," was the composed answer. "But Douglas doesn't like me to speak to people I don't know."

And so saying Miss Bee walked away, and seated herself close to Douglas, from which vantage-ground she surveyed her late interlocutors with round disapproving eyes. They passed twice, talking earnestly, and glancing occasionally at Bee and her companion. Then they were joined by a tall spare man in blue spectacles, with whom they finally walked away.

Bee related the conversation verbatim to Douglas, who, being absorbed in "Plato's Dialogues," only answered absently:

"Don't bother, there's a good little woman."

Soon after this Douglas closed his book and said it was time to go home. They walked along the Embankment hand-in-

hand in the level light of the setting sun, the light summer wind blowing velvety against their faces, and ruffling Bee's short feathery curls.

* * * * *

It was a dull sultry afternoon some weeks later. Douglas was walking restlessly about the room, stopping every now and then at the open window to look out into the dusty street.

He had not succeeded in getting any employment of any kind. He owed Mrs. Dobbs two weeks' rent, and he had only a couple of shillings in the world. Something very like despair was beginning to creep round his heart. What if circumstances should prove too strong for him after all? he thought drearily. He was no coward. It was for Bee his heart failed him. Poverty and want he could combat for himself; but for Bee—little Bee—He looked at her sadly. No sign of care about *her*. Her frock was turned up and pinned round her waist, *à la* Mrs. Dobbs, and with a very business-like face and air she was dusting all Douglas's books, an occupation which she pursued intermittently at all hours of the day. She was humming gently to herself, and the tip of her little red tongue was plainly visible, as it always was when she was busy or absorbed. When she had finished she put away her duster and climbed upon a chair by the window to water the plants, which looked sickly and drooping in the thundery heat.

"Douglas," she called out presently in great excitement, "do come and look. The most beautiful carriage at our door, with two brown horses and two coachmen."

As she spoke a thundering knock echoed from the door below, and when a considerable time had elapsed the door of the room was thrown open by Mrs. Dobbs, and an old lady and gentleman walked in—the very same old lady and gentleman who had spoken to Bee in Temple Gardens. The lady was very stout, and very handsomely dressed. Her companion was also stout, and had rather a fierce appearance. The latter at once addressed himself to Douglas, whose dark blue eyes held a look of surprised inquiry, not unmingled with resentment, for some swift intuition informed him of the object of their visit.

"Good morning, my good lad, good morning," said the old gentleman in a loud pompous voice. "My name is Chandler—Joseph Chandler. We saw you and the little girl there a few

weeks ago in Temple Gardens. Mrs. Chandler"—this with a wave of his hand towards the old lady, who had seated herself in a chair, and was panting loudly, and very much after the fashion of Mrs. Dobbs—"Mrs. Chandler, I say, was struck by the likeness the child bears to our daughter, who—um—who died some years ago. The woman downstairs tells me you are the little girl's brother. I want to know if that is the case."

There was something inexpressibly insolent and overbearing about Mr. Chandler's manner, and Douglas was conscious of a wild and almost uncontrollable desire to say something equally aggressive in return. But he did not. He only requested his visitor to be seated. Then he sat down himself; for a curiously sick feeling had taken possession of him. Could it be true—could it be *possible* that his gentle, refined little Bee could belong to these people?—that this vulgar old man could be her grandfather?—this cook-like old woman her grandmother? If so, it was a sad shattering of all his fondly-imagined dreams regarding her birth.

He suddenly became aware that Mr. Chandler was speaking. His voice was harsher now, and more pronounced in accent than before. H's appeared and disappeared with wild inconsequence. Mrs. Chandler was making breathless overtures to Bee, who had retreated within the shelter of Douglas's arm.

"We saw the child, as I said, in Temple Gardens, some weeks ago," Mr. Chandler was saying, his eyes meanwhile roving contemptuously round the barely-furnished room, "and Mrs. C.—Mrs. Chandler, I should say—considered her the living image of what our daughter Sarah was at that age. As the child gave us her name and the name of this street, we have managed to trace her, and a fine troublesome job it has been. If it turns out that she *is* our grand-daughter, of course we shall relieve you of the care of her. So, my lad, be prepared to answer any questions I may put to you."

Douglas's face grew a shade paler, but he did not speak. Mr. Chandler cleared his throat, flourished one hand, on which an enormous diamond glittered, and went on:

"Our daughter Sarah ran away from a good Christian 'ome to be married to a snuff-the-moon young scamp who had nothing but his handsome face to recommend him. Mrs. C. and me were in a poor way then, and lived out at Peckham. Well, a year or two or may

be three passed, and we heard nothing of Sarah, until one afternoon we got a line from St. George's Hospital, saying as how a young woman was dying there and had sent for us. When we got there, we found it was our daughter Sarah, and she died soon after. She was a widow, she said, and she was in a great way about her little child; she kep' crying out that it was lost, that it had run out into the street while she was in some shop, and that it would be killed—and things like that. But we took it for ravings, for we never knew she had had a child; and besides at that time I didn't see my way to burdening myself with other folks' children. But when I made my pile, which I did all in a leap, as one might say, not to mention a thumping legacy from a relative in Australia, my old woman—Mrs. Chandler, I should say—took a notion to adopt a little one; and we had almost fixed on a child from the Foundling, when we saw this little girl in Temple Gardens. Mrs. C. would have it that it must be Sarah's child—the likeness was so strong—and nothing would serve her but that we should ferret her out. So what I want to know is, if she really is your sister or no. Even if she is, as my old woman—Mrs. Chandler, I should say—has taken the fancy into her head, and as you seem to have enough to do, from what your landlady says, to keep yourself, perhaps we may come to some arrangement about taking the little miss for our own. Of course I should be liberal, you know. Thank God! I can afford to indulge my wife's notions, whatever the cost may be." Here the speaker paused, and used his pocket-handkerchief with fierce violence.

A wave of colour rushed over the lad's face, then receded, leaving it white as death.

"You are suggesting that I should sell my little sister to you?" he said in a strange hard voice.

"No, no, Douglas; don't sell me!" cried Bee in a sudden agony of tears.

"Hush!" he said almost sternly. But as he spoke he pressed her to him so tightly that he almost hurt her. Then he looked straight at his visitor, his eyes flashing, his lips trembling somewhat:

"I am poor," he went on, speaking slowly and seemingly with difficulty—"very poor. But—I am not quite so poor—as that."

"She is your sister, then?" demanded Mr. Chandler.

The lad was silent.

"Now, no shuffling, sir," blustered the old gentleman; "yes, or no. Is she your sister or is she not?"

"Bee," said Douglas, commanding his voice with an effort, "go into my room, and remain there until I call you."

The child went at once, winking very fast to keep back her tears. When the door had closed after her, Douglas said coldly, "Now, Mr. Chandler, I am ready to answer any questions you may wish to put to me."

At the end of a somewhat hectoring examination, the boy's sore heart was fain to acknowledge that it did indeed seem possible that these people had a claim upon his little girl.

"I cannot part with her," he said hoarsely. "I—cannot give her up."

"My good lad, if we can prove our claim, you won't be asked whether you can part with her or not," answered Mr. Chandler roughly. "However, I've prepared you, and——"

Here Mrs. Chandler, who had hitherto taken no part in the conversation, broke in:

"And I'm sure it would be a blessed change for the poor child, for she would have every comfort, and decent clothes to her back, not to speak of——"

"There, there, Eliza, that'll do," interrupted her husband sharply. "If the child is our grand-daughter, this young fellow will have to let her go, and no more about it, so don't talk." Then, turning to Douglas, "And even if she isn't, you must be a young fool to hesitate. You acknowledge she's no relation of yours, and I suppose you have the sense to know you can't go on living together when you're a young man and she's a young woman? However, I shall consult my lawyer, and have the thing thoroughly sifted. Of course, if we prove our claim, we'll arrange that you may see your little friend occasionally, and I shall repay you for any expense you may have been put to. Not that it can be much; but I like to be just, and——"

"That will do!" interrupted Douglas in a queer voice. "I shall be glad if—you will go now. Good afternoon."

"Good-day to you," returned Mr. Chandler, turning red with anger; "and I'd advise you to keep a civil tongue in your head, young man, or perhaps you'll wish you had."

But Douglas hardly heard him.

When he had closed the door after them, he sat down by the table and leaned his head on his hands. A storm of conflicting feelings raged in his heart. To lose Bee!—it would take all the light out of his life. And yet—ought he not to rejoice that a way of escape should be opened for her, poor little woman, out of the weary road of want and privation which must be his for so long, perhaps for always? He could have almost borne to part with her if these people had been gentle, courteous, well-born, like his own father and mother. Would Bee grow to be like her newly-found relatives? (For he had a chill conviction that they *were* her relatives.) Should he see her changing year by year, until she was no longer the dainty loving creature he knew—the same, yet *not* the same? He could not bear to think of it. He rose hastily, opened the door of his room, and said sadly enough:

“You can come out now, Bee.”

She took his hand and went with him back into the sitting-room. On her cheeks and lashes lay tears too heavy for childhood. He sat down and took her on his knee, stifling a half sob as he felt the dear baby arms twine round his neck.

“Douglas,” she sobbed piteously, “you won’t sell me? You *won’t* send me away, *will* you?”

“Hush! Bee, darling,” he made answer. “You—you don’t understand.”

“I do—I do,” wept the little creature. “I know that wicked old man wants to take me away. But you won’t let him, will you? I’m your baby—not his. You *couldn’t* do without me.”

“Dear little Bee, listen to me,” he said, trying to speak steadily.

Then he tried to explain as well as he could to her childish mind that she was not really his little Bee at all—that they were brother and sister only in love, not in reality.

“And you know, my darling,” he went on, “if, as this man—this Mr. Chandler—says, you are his grand-daughter, I must let you go—I cannot help it. But we shall know very soon. And if—if I must give you up, I know you will never forget me, dear. And we shall see each other sometimes, I hope; and—we shall always love each other.”

But Bee wept sorely and would not be comforted. She was Douglas’s “little girl”—his baby, and she could not understand why she should belong to any one else. And Douglas’s heart was very heavy; for the certainty was fast deepening that these

terribly vulgar old people had indeed the right to take his darling from him, and that, once separated, their lives would flow very, very far apart—perhaps lose sight of each other for ever.

Tea was a sad enough meal that night. Bee's tears fell fast into the tea-cups. And Douglas was very silent. He was thinking sorrowfully of many days and evenings, of months and years, when the dear child-face opposite him would be only a memory; when the room would be strangely still and silent; when his heart would be empty. Then his face burned as he thought of old Chandler's coarse insinuation as to the years to come. Whose business was it, he thought, with the fierce self-lawgiving of boyhood, if they should choose to live together until they were old? What brother and sister could be more to each other than they?

After tea they sat by the window silently, their arms clasped about each other, the fair head leaning heavily against the dark one. The narrow street grew darker, noisier. Stars came out in the dusky sky. And little Bee sobbed herself to sleep.

* * * * *

Some days passed, and it was proved beyond doubt that Bee was not Bee Conrath at all, but the child of the Chandlers' only daughter, and that she was thenceforth to be known as Katharine Adeane.

And then—ah! then there came a dreadful day when a little sobbing, trembling figure, with dishevelled hair and eyes red and swollen with weeping, clung despairingly to the one friend she knew in the whole world—face to face with her first real sorrow. While in the street below Mr. Chandler's horses champed their bits and pawed the ground in lordly impatience. Mrs. Chandler was in the carriage; she had not come up. The stairs, she said, would be the death of her.

Douglas's face was very white, and his voice was very low and tremulous, though infinitely tender, as he bent over his lost baby, murmuring:

"My little Bee, you will be brave. You promised you would. Don't cry, darling, or—or you will make me cry too."

His voice failed just here, and he clasped the child convulsively in his arms.

"Good-bye, my darling. May God take care of you and bless you always," he said with a quick dry sob.

She clung to him tightly, bravely trying "not to cry."
That was their parting.

For a minute silence throbbed through the little room. Then he carried her downstairs and put her into the carriage without a single word. He did not even greet Mrs. Chandler, save by a slight bend of the head.

He stood back—still silently—while the footman closed the door, and shut Bee out from the old life for ever. With a clatter of hoofs the horses dashed off down the street, amid the shrill shouts of a small crowd of street Arabs who had assembled on the pavement.

But Douglas saw nothing but a pale, wistful little face, and eyes that tried to be tearless in obedience to his desire. A few more heart-beats, and Bee was whirled away out of his sight.

He stood quite still for a minute or two, his teeth pressed hard upon his under-lip. Then he walked rapidly down the street—walked on and on and on, until his limbs ached and his head felt giddy. But he did not turn homeward. He could not go back to that silent room. Not yet.

(To be continued.)
